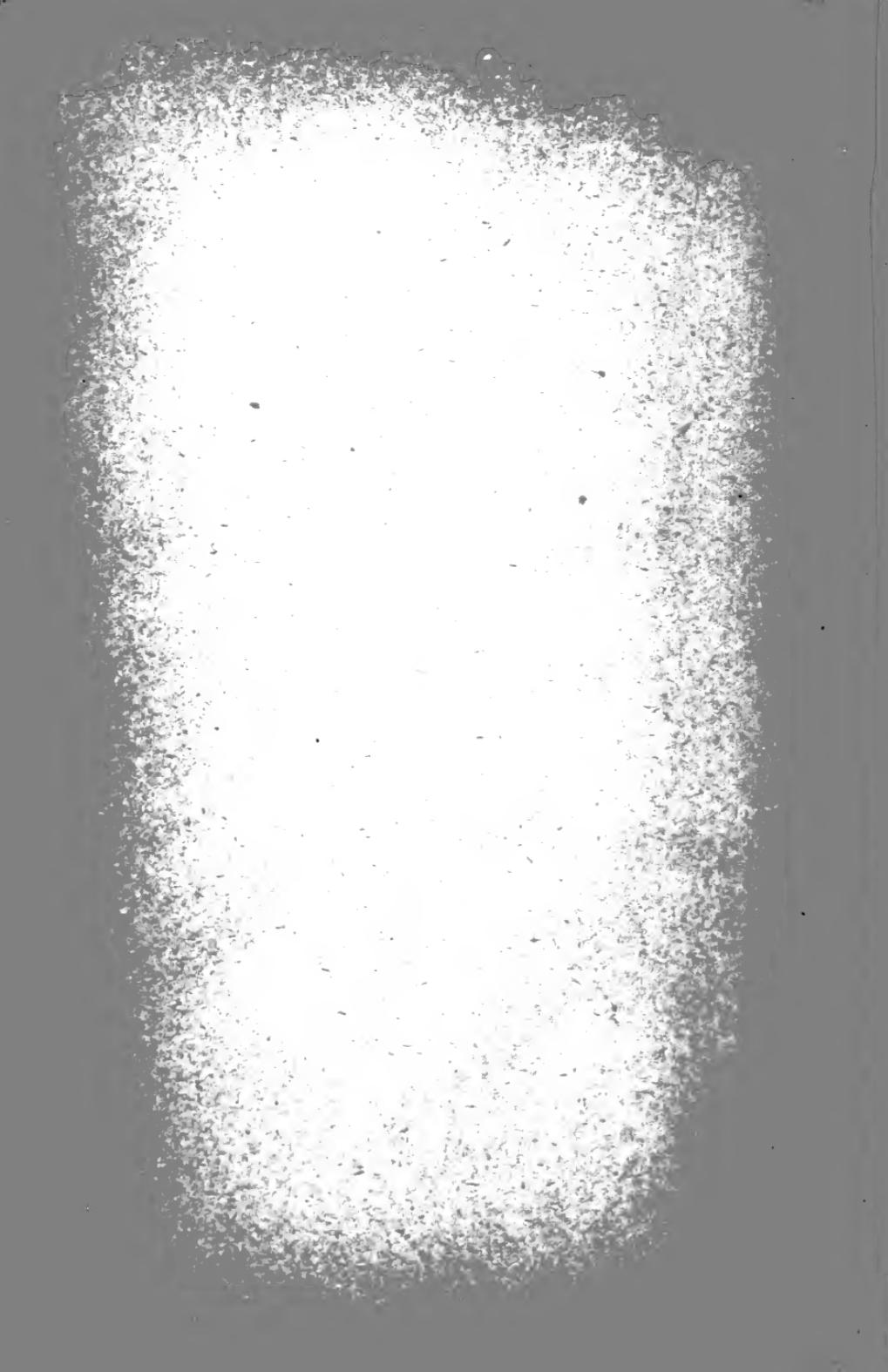


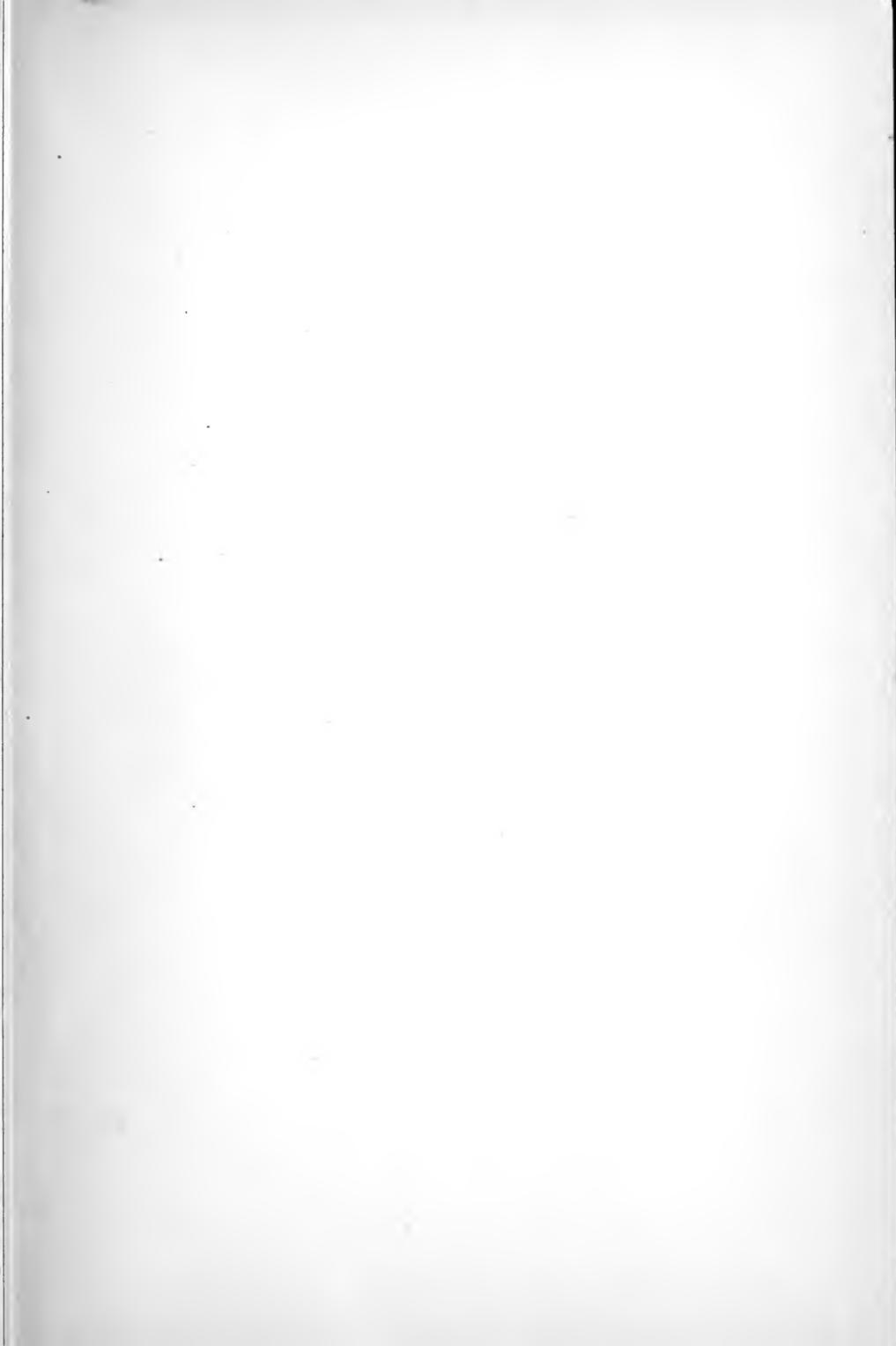
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THE INSPIRATION OF HISTORY

By the Same Author

CHRISTIANITY IN THE
DAILY CONDUCT OF LIFE

12mo, \$1.50



THOMAS WHITTAKER, Publisher
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THE
INSPIRATION OF HISTORY

BY

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Vicar-Emeritus of St. Paul's Chapel,
Trinity Parish, N. Y.



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THE CREDIBILITY OF HISTORY.

THE INSPIRATION OF HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory :

THE CREDIBILITY OF HISTORY.

HISTORY is in our time emphatically under suspicion. So many of its alleged and heretofore universally accredited facts have, within the last half century, been resolved by the new methods of historical criticism into fictions, that, in the popular mind, there is a general disposition to question its old claim to trustworthiness.

Indeed, not only in the popular mind, but even among the really thoughtful and scholarly, the question is seriously raised whether the credibility to which the records of history are entitled can be accounted scientific in any true sense of the word.

And yet the old foundation ground remains firm. There is to mankind an existence in the past as sure as in the present, and history is the record which that past has made. Fiction and history are a con-

tradiction in terms. History has no business with anything but fact, and its legitimate business is nothing else but to keep determined facts permanently known. The very root-meaning of the word is *to know*. Its essential substance is *fact-knowledge*. Its function in life is nothing else but to be perpetually the self-revelation, the monumental witness of fact.

History has been eloquently declared to be the *memory* of mankind, and, obviously, in the life of the world at large it occupies the place and fulfils the function which memory does in the life of each individual man. Memory is a blank without fact, and fact remembered is fact known—*res acta*, *fait accompli*—fact identified with the man's own life and forming a constituent element in his very existence.

It does not follow that the memory of any one is, or is supposed to be, absolutely infallible. It is, in fact, seldom or never so. In every one it is under the limitations of human imperfection, and so, liable to inaccuracies both of record and report. In many cases it has no hold on or capability of retaining circumstantial details, and sometimes its supposed impressions are the mere hallucinations of a disordered imagination. But, nevertheless, memory is to every one's living consciousness the

only witness of his experience, of what has happened to him, and of what has been done, said, or thought by him in the past ; and it is justly accepted and trusted as such.

The reason is obvious. Memory is nothing else but the recorder of fact. Whether, in strict truth, itself a recorder, or simply the record—an active faculty or impressionable process—it may not be easy to say ; but the essential point is that its very existence depends on fact. Without fact there is no possibility of memory. The slightest divergence from impression of fact in the mind of a man vacates for him the function of memory and puts imagination in its place. Therefore when a man says, “I remember,” he means to say simply that he retains the impression of a certain event or deed in his past life ; and after making all due allowance for human imperfection, *if he is sure that it is memory* which now quickens his consciousness to a perception of the past event or deed, he is as sure of its actual occurrence and of his experience through it as he is or can be of his present existence.

Now all this is equally true of history in the general life of mankind. It may be conceded at once that history may be inaccurate in many circumstantial details, and that no inconsiderable part of its generally accepted records is absolutely fictitious,

or so inaccurate in statement, by either omission or exaggeration, as to be utterly untrustworthy ; but, nevertheless, history, on the whole, is trustworthy. It depends on truth, the truth of fact, for its very being. Its business is with fact, and with nothing else. Without fact—fact that has actually occurred —there can be no history. The slightest divergence from fact in any pretended record puts that record so far out of the category of history and relegates it to that of fiction or poetry.

But, it may be said, conceding all this to be true of history in the abstract, it yet determines nothing for practical purpose as to the trustworthiness of history in any particular. And this is the real difficulty in dealing with its alleged facts. They come to us in detail, and we have to examine them separately, one by one. It is easy enough to say that they are not history if they be not true ; but our definition has not the least effect toward determining whether they are true or not—the very point which is important for us to be determined. Trust in history is of little consequence if the trust be only in an abstraction. What we want for practical purpose is to know how far we can trust, or whether we can trust at all, this or that document or allegation which comes to us with a claim to be historical, and therefore true.

Granting this, yet something is gained, surely, in having determined at the outset what history itself truly and properly is. We know, then, on what ground we stand and what our own attitude upon it ought to be.

But is it quite true, or rather is it the whole truth to say that the records of history are to be taken by us in separate details, and the truth of them determined by subjecting them to examination on their own evidential merit, separately and one by one ? No doubt there is a sense in which it is true to say that history is made up of documents and records which have their place in it determined by the verifiable credit of each one on its own merits ; true also that its reports come to us in details. But this is equally true of memory. We recollect by recalling incidents ; and our remembrance of the past is more or less complete and perfectly accurate just in proportion to the inclusion in our memory, or failure to include, its every incident, each one in its true original relation. *But confidence in memory, on the whole, does not depend on our assurance that we can recall everything that has occurred.* We know perfectly well that we cannot—that we cannot in any case or in relation to any event, much less in relation to the past as a whole. Nevertheless we rightly feel that

memory is, on the whole, trustworthy, and do actually put trust in it ; and that for two reasons : First, because, as already stated, we know that memory has no other function than to be the record and report of actual facts, and also because, as we now add, we know that there is a general law which combines all essential facts together, and so fixes in the memory a true impression of the past as a whole, without necessarily recalling every one of its incidents in separate detail.

Now the same law holds in general history, and the same conclusion is valid in justification of confidence in its trustworthiness. Granted that events occurring one by one have made up the past history of the world in general, as of the life of every person ; granted that they have been reported separately, in so far as they have been reported at all, and may therefore be so recalled ; but still it is true to say that no one of them occurred separately in such sense as to have been in absolute isolation. The law of cause and effect is the bond of continuous identity in all life, and by its effective bond every historical fact is connected, directly or remotely, with every other fact. Every one as it occurs, though an item in severalty, is yet an item in combination, always necessarily in combination. *And it is the combination, rather than the separate*

items, which makes up the true impression of past history. We rightly conclude, therefore, that history is trustworthily credible on the whole, even though its records are allowed to be incomplete in many particulars, or even though in some of their details they are found to be false.

But in the study of history the object unquestionably is to get a correct knowledge of the deeds and events which have made up the life of mankind in the past; and there can be no question of the practical importance of determining on the reports of past occurrences which have come to us as items of history, whether they are really such and therefore entitled to our acceptance and belief. For this purpose they may properly, and indeed must be subjected to critical examination and tested by the established rules of evidence. To a certain extent they may and must be examined separately, and each one tested on its own evidential merits—only it must always be remembered that the point is to determine *whether they are or not truly items of history.* If so, they cannot stand alone, cannot be tested in isolation, but *for the final verdict* must be considered in relation to other occurrences which are known to have happened, and which in their combined capacity make up the chapter of history in which the event under examination is alleged to have occurred.

In so far as records of deeds and events in the life of mankind, which have come to us as history, can be verified by these tests, they are justly entitled to be accepted as such, and in such acceptance are as justly determined to be credible. The facts alleged are then determined to be *known* facts. Their truth is demonstrated, and our assurance of their occurrence in the past is not less scientific than is our assurance of facts all around us in the present.

No one has stated this general law of historic credibility more succinctly than Mr. Huxley. In beginning one of his lectures on evolution, he says : “The occurrence of historical facts is said to be demonstrated when the evidence that they happened is of such a character as to render the assumption that they did not happen in the highest degree improbable.”* By “the evidence that they happened” he clearly means, not the isolated evidence of each one on its own merits, but the evidence in combination with that of other correlated facts, the combination being of such character as to hold all the alleged facts in legitimate relationship with each other, and so finding its completeness as a whole only in their legitimate union. Wherever such union is traceably determined, he

* Science and Hebrew Tradition, p. 114.

justly concludes the occurrence of the historical fact to be "demonstrated."

The eloquent Père Lacordaire, in one of his famous Nôtre Dame conferences,* has drawn out a statement of the principles on which historic certainty is grounded at much greater length. Prefacing his statement with the definition to which we have before referred, of history as "the *memory* of mankind," he propounds three conditions which combine to make history, or, more properly, as he states it, historical writing, entirely credible and trustworthy.

First. "*The writing must be public'*"—that is, it must have for its substantial foundation public documents—documents which emanated from people living at a time in the past, and were published and circulated among that people at the time or within a reasonable period of the time when the events to which they refer were in actual occurrence.

Secondly. "*Writing which claims to be history must bear upon public events.'*"

The words and deeds which are simply those of private persons in their individual capacity have, obviously, no place in history. Many of the words

* On Jesus Christ, pp. 174-189.

and deeds even of public personages have no relation to public affairs, and, however interesting, are to be regarded simply as incidents in private life, and have properly no place in general history. In very clear recognition of this distinction, Talleyrand is said to have replied to one who, bringing to him an announcement of the death of Napoleon at St. Helena, spoke of it as “a sad event :” “That is not an event ; it is simply an incident.” A few years earlier it would have been an event, and one of great historical importance. So Lacordaire justly declares it to be a necessary condition of historical certainty that we should “separate the two elements,” the public and the private, “and give to the former, by that separation, all its force and all its lustre.”

“The third condition necessary to raise writing to the state of history is that *the events should blend together and form a public and general web.*”

“A solitary fact is not a historical fact ; it has no real place ; it floats in air. Still much less should we give this name to a fact which cannot take its place in the general web of history without deranging its whole economy. This is the infallible sign of imposture. The force of history, like the force of every other real order, is in its completeness and unity. When a man stands alone,

he is nothing ; when a fact stands alone, it is nothing. But let a man enter into association with others, they form a family, a people, the whole human race. And, in like manner, when a fact enters into historical association with others, and not with others only, but with all the rest ; let it become necessary to the general web of history, so that history cannot be constructed without that fact—then it possesses not only the force of a historical fact, but the force of all history ; then we must accept it or deny the entire life of the human race.”

That the combination of these three conditions in any case furnishes a demonstration of its occurrence as a historical fact, which is, in a true sense, scientific, seems to us to be clear. And having such demonstration for the substantial basis of belief, we may safely and reasonably disregard as unworthy of consideration all objections against it which, however plausible, are based only on special criticism either of the inherent improbability of the fact or the insufficiency of particular evidence for it.

This may be made clear by one or two illustrations. A recent writer has attempted, by such criticism, to controvert the accepted record of the signing of Magna Charta by King John at Runnymede in 1215, and his critical notes of doubt are in

themselves really plausible. But it is a sufficient reply to say that the entire course of subsequent English history depends on that fact, and was undeniably determined by it. An event which might in itself have belonged only to the annals of domestic life, and of which the evidence would, in that case, have been no stronger than such as is customarily afforded in domestic records, is referred to by Professor G. W. Protheroy, in his Edinburgh University inaugural address,* as an illustration of the demonstrative authentication which is given even to such a fact by having its place as a determining factor in general history. The event referred to was the marriage of Henry II. of England to Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Cathedral of Lisieux, in the year of our Lord 1150. "That marriage," as he says, "gave the kings of England a great domain in France, and entailed long wars between the two countries. This struggle, lasting throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was the chief cause of the baronial anarchy which culminated in the wars of the Roses. The Tudor despotism was the outcome of those wars, and in trying to maintain that despotism the Stuarts lost their throne. The revolution which overthrew the

Stuarts gave supremacy to Parliament, and led directly to the union. Finally, the Parliament of Great Britain, after proving its capacity by creating the British Empire and defeating Napoleon, formed the model of civil government throughout the civilized world. And so we may, nay, we must, treat any great historical event, until the ages are ‘ bound each to each by natural piety.’ ”

One more illustration, and that a very striking one, may be given from our own American history —viz., the signing of the Declaration of Independence by the members of the Continental Congress in the year 1776. This is a fact which was witnessed in the deed and authenticated in the publication by only friendly partisans, and arguments might easily be found by captious critics to show the improbability of the commonly received historical account of it, and to raise a question whether those whose names are now found attached to that instrument are really entitled to the honor they have received. It might be said that the signing of such a declaration, at the time it is alleged to have taken place, is highly improbable because, in the first place, of the then relative strength of England and America. On the one hand there was an empire second in all the elements of national power to none other on earth, while, on the other side,

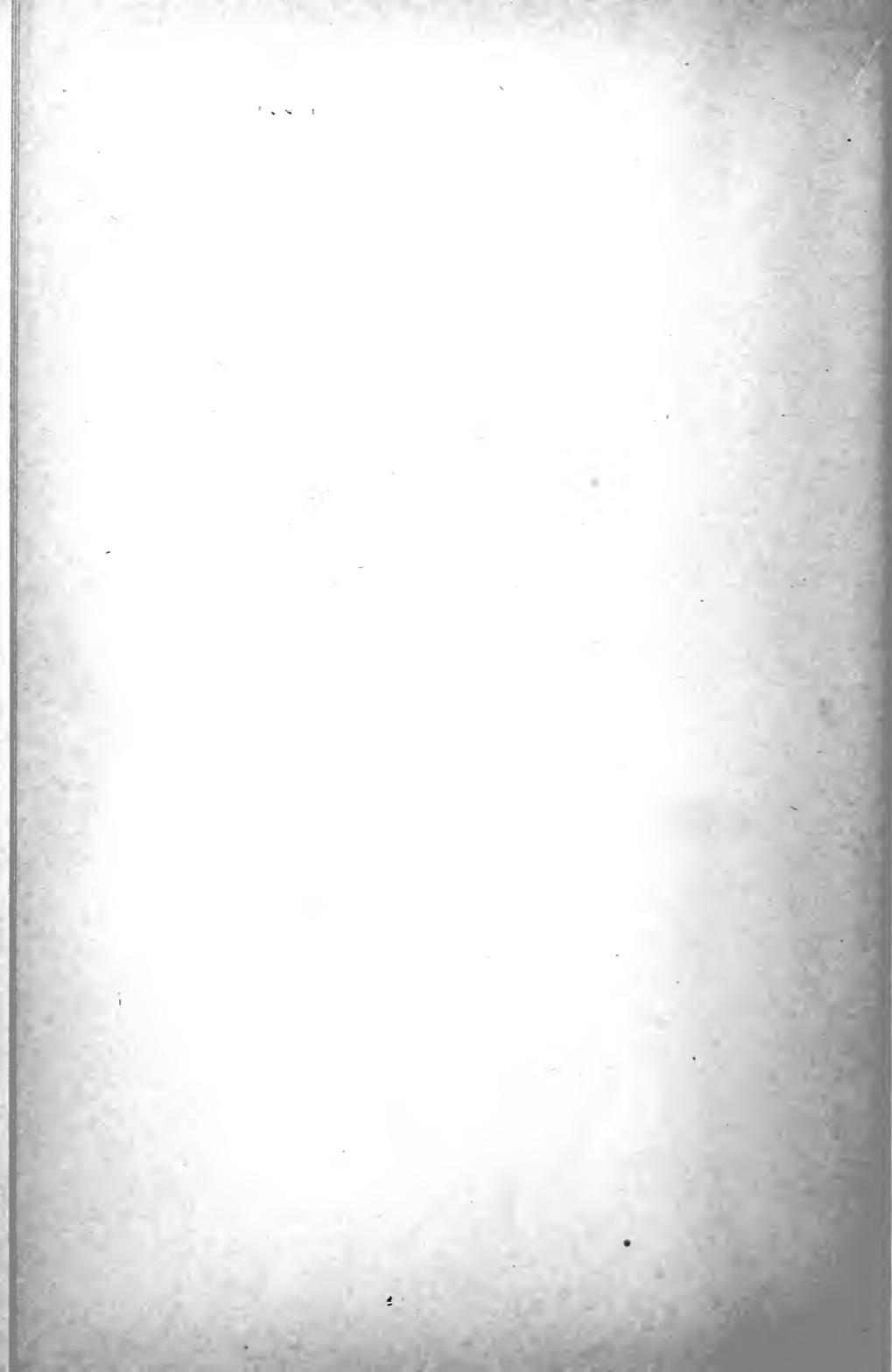
there were only a few young and feeble colonies. To have arrayed these colonies in opposition to such a power as this declaration assumed to do, could hardly have been done by reasonable men. They must have seen that all the probabilities were against their success in such an unequal conflict ; and, for themselves, the pledge of their lives, their fortunes, and sacred honor to it was simply suicidal, a stake so desperate under the circumstances that it could not have been made without a degree of unselfish heroism which is more than human. On the other hand, the forging or the antedating of documents is not difficult ; and it is easy to see that when in the marvellous course of events the United States did actually become independent, there were motives strong enough to have induced the forging or antedating of this, since nothing could be more creditable to these congressional legislators than to have anticipated so improbable a fact by so heroic a declaration.

Now all such criticism is certainly very absurd ; but, let us observe, it is absurd simply because we know that there is a vast amount of genuine historical evidence in proof of the fact, sufficient to render it absolutely certain. We know that not only by the congressional record of the day, but also by all the struggles of the Revolutionary War,

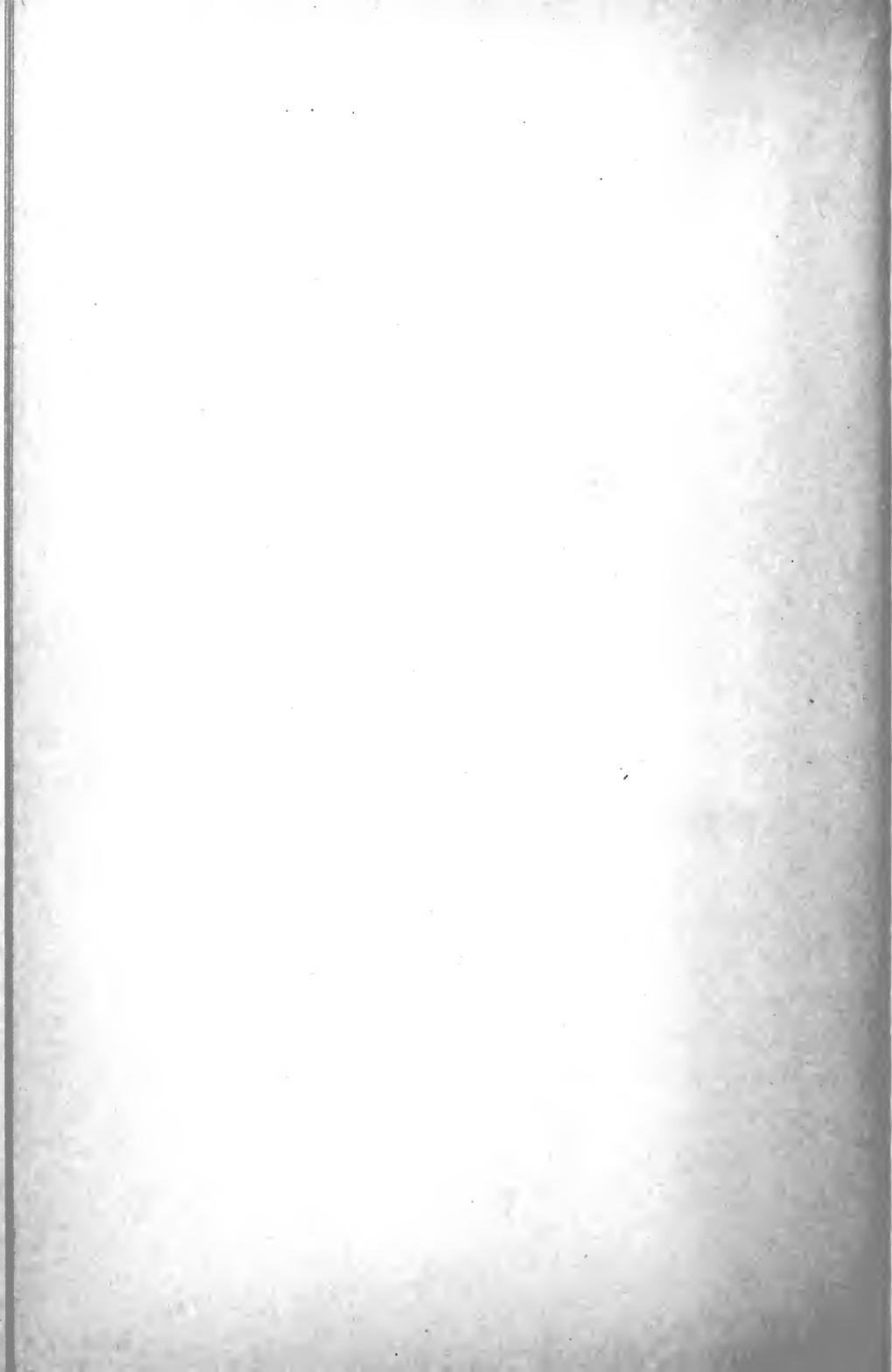
by all the history of our country since, and by its very existence as a nation now, this fact is authenticated beyond the possibility of question or shadow of reasonable doubt.

In the light of these illustrations, the foregoing considerations seem clearly to warrant the following conclusions :

- I. History has a substantial basis of *fact*, the truth of which is scientifically determinable.
- II. Its trustworthy credibility is not invalidated by discoveries of errors in special details.
- III. Historical criticism, to be of any value, must take into account not only the special evidence of particular incidents, but also the entire body of evidence which is afforded by the combination of these incidents with all others with which they are connected or correlated.



THE BIBLE A HISTORICAL BOOK.



CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE A HISTORICAL BOOK.

It has long ago been settled in the consciousness of Christendom that the Bible is, in the truest and most proper sense of the word, one book. Its very title by which it has come to be universally known, and which has been given to it in this consciousness, indicates the recognition of it not only as a book, but, with unique emphasis, as THE Book.

Very clearly, however, its unity so recognized is something different from that which we commonly have in mind when we speak of a book. It is not a continuous and logically connected discussion of one topic ; it is not one as a treatise, a drama, a poem, or a history ; it is not one in either the subject-matter or the style of its composition ; it is not the work of one author, not the product of one age, not originally issued in one country, or written in one language—in fact, the Bible is, as we all know when we give it thought, a Book of many original books, sixty-six in all, thirty-nine of the Old Testament and twenty-seven of the New. And these books were written by almost as many

different authors, in different countries—countries as far apart from each other and as different in the characteristics of their civilization as Egypt and Arabia, Chaldea, Assyria, Judea, and Rome ; in different ages, ages of history extending over a period of more than a thousand years.

In the critical investigation of historical documents, which is one of the characteristic specialties of modern scholarship, the real historical origin of the several parts of the Bible has received and is receiving such scrutiny as it never had or could have had before ; and laying great stress on this diversity of authorship, the inference is drawn that the Bible can no longer be regarded as essentially different from other books, at least not from such as treat specially of religious history and doctrine.

But there is one point of essential difference between the Bible and all other books or class of books with which it may properly be compared, which is strangely overlooked and left entirely out of account by those who are disposed to rest in this conclusion. Suppose we should collect and bind up in one volume the literature—the books accredited as the classics—of an equal number of countries in other parts of the world for an equally long period ; or, to make the case more exactly parallel, suppose it were possible to trace the history of any

other ancient race of men scattered through as many successive ages among other peoples in as many different parts of the world, and so far identified with each of these nations as to participate in the diversified characteristics of their various civilizations ; and suppose such tracing to be made through documentary evidences written at different periods in one country and another ; and then that all these documents should be collected and bound up in one volume—what a heterogeneous book we should have ! What diversity, without possible reconciliation, in its contents ! What utterly irreconcilable differences of thought and feeling ! How unlike and altogether out of harmony with each other the views of life, the representations of its habitual ways and works, the theories of its purpose and destiny would be presented by the different authors, representing each his own time, people, and age ! How many different and disagreeing religions would thus be represented ! how many and varying ceremonies and modes of worship ! how many gods as the objects of worship, with attributed characters as multiplied and conflicting as their numerous names ! No one with any knowledge of history would expect for a moment the possibility of any more harmonious result if he should attempt to bring together such a collection of the documentary repre-

sentatives of the different stages of ancient civilization for so long a period as fifteen centuries in any part of the world.

But when we turn from this imagined collection to that which we actually have in the Bible, what do we find? Marvellous, and except on one explanation utterly unaccountable, the fact that from beginning to end, throughout all its nearly seventy separable books, with their original diversities of language, scope, purpose, and style, *there is a substantial agreement, an accordant harmony, and in some important particulars an absolute identity of both practical and doctrinal teaching.*

1. First of all, and most important, *there is this identity of doctrine with respect to the SUPREME BEING, the Author and Sustainer of the created universe, unto whom all religious worship and service are due and to be rendered.* “*Hear, O Israel, THE LORD our GOD is ONE LORD.*”* This is the fundamental proclamation which is accepted and held with faith that is absolutely identical by every writer of every book, and never lost sight of or departed from on any page or in any word of the Bible, from beginning to end. The Bible is emphatically, as its unique distinction, the Book of God.

* Deut. 6 : 4.

Its one purpose is to tell of Him : His being, nature, and will. In the consciousness of every reader this purpose differentiates it, and makes it stand apart from all other books ; and no matter what the special object of any one of its particular books, its one dominating purpose is ever felt to be the revelation of God and of His supreme dominion in the world and throughout the universe.

2. Then, not less remarkable, is *the entire agreement of all its writers in declaring God to be perfectly righteous, holy, and good.* From Moses to Isaiah and the last of the prophets there is unanimous agreement that there can be no shade of evil in God, that from everlasting to everlasting He is absolutely perfect in goodness as in power. “The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”* “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy : I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”† “I will come

* Ex. 34 : 6, 7.

† Isa. 57 : 15.

near to you to judgment ; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. For I the Lord change not ; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”*

It is not possible to exaggerate the contrast between the revelation of God, which is given in such passages (and they are but specimens of the unanimous teaching of the Bible throughout in both Testaments), and the conceptions of the character of supernatural beings, whether of the Supreme Deity or of His subordinate divinities, which is found in the primitive records and legends of all other ancient peoples. We need not take for this purpose the grotesque and monstrous viciousness which filled the classic Pantheon with unutterable defilement. We may go back to the “cleanest and purest record of theological belief in all antiquity” outside of the Bible, that which is still to be read on the monumental stone of the Moabites, and the fundamental difference in conception and feeling relating to the supernatural, as Professor Sanday,

* Mal. 3 : 5, 6.

whose learning and candor are alike unimpeachable, observes, is none the less apparent. The most pious of the Moabite kings could think, in the desperate extremity of defeat in a final struggle for liberty, of no surer way of appeasing the ill-will of his god, Chemosh, than to take his oldest son that should have reigned in his stead and offer him for a burnt-offering upon the city wall.* There is abundant evidence that among the Moabites it was customary, as a religious rite with its abominable accompaniments and merciless consequences, to make their sons and daughters to "pass through the fires to Molech." In view of the undeniable fact that in all the ancient ethnic religions there are sure to be found, in inseparable connection with much that is ennobling, both ideas and practices of degrading superstition, Professor Sanday well remarks that "the great problem for the student of religions is why the religion of Israel alone should be so remarkably free from this baser mixture. Why was not the worship of Jehovah like the worship of Baal, or Tammuz, or Cybele, or Astarte, or Mylitta? Why was it not like the worship of a race so nearly akin to Israel as the Moabite?"† No solution of this problem can be admitted as consistent with his-

* 2 Kings 3 : 27.

† Lectures on Inspiration, p. 139.

toric truth which does not take into account the fact that the religious teachers of the people of Israel constantly and invariably taught them, as no other people were taught, that God is a Being of perfect righteousness, who cannot look on iniquity with the least degree of allowance.*

3. Then there is equal agreement concerning *the relation of God to us His creatures and our consequent obligations of duty toward Him, and, in and through that fundamental obligation, toward each other and toward all created beings.* In the very beginning of the Mosaic dispensation it was declared not less plainly than by the Founder of the Christian dispensation fifteen centuries later, that to love the Lord God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, is the first and greatest com-

* The preparation of Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, which seems at first view to be a parallel case with that of the king of Moab, was not so in truth. It is recorded as a remarkable and entirely exceptional test of his obedient spirit ; was not allowed to be consummated ; and no reader of the Bible has ever supposed it to be consistent with the Divine character as there revealed that its consummation should have been allowed. On the other hand, Mesha's sacrifice of his son was clearly prompted by the Moabite conception of religious devotion and its traditional theory of such sacrifice as would be most acceptable to his god, Chemosh, and therefore most likely to secure his favor.

mandment, and to do justice and love mercy to all men, even though they be only strangers, not less required by the Divine will and in conformity to the Divine nature.* And the ethics summarily inculcated and enjoined in the Ten Commandments are adhered to without the slightest divergence, as constituting the fundamental ethical platform of every religious teacher in every stage of the Bible history, throughout both the Old Testament and the New.

4. In equal agreement are the Biblical writers, so that their teachings constitute an absolute identity of doctrine concerning *the origin, the purpose, and the final destiny of our human life*; we might even say, *of all life in this world of our habitation and of the very world itself*. This is so very obvious and unquestionable that we need only to make the statement without comment or illustrative expansion. Every reader of the Bible recognizes at once the picture which it draws, and from which no line of it ever varies, of life in this world as a gift of Divine creation, of its educational and probationary purpose, and of its final destiny, under the laws of righteous responsibility, for eternal good or ill.

Such unity of doctrinal teaching in documents of

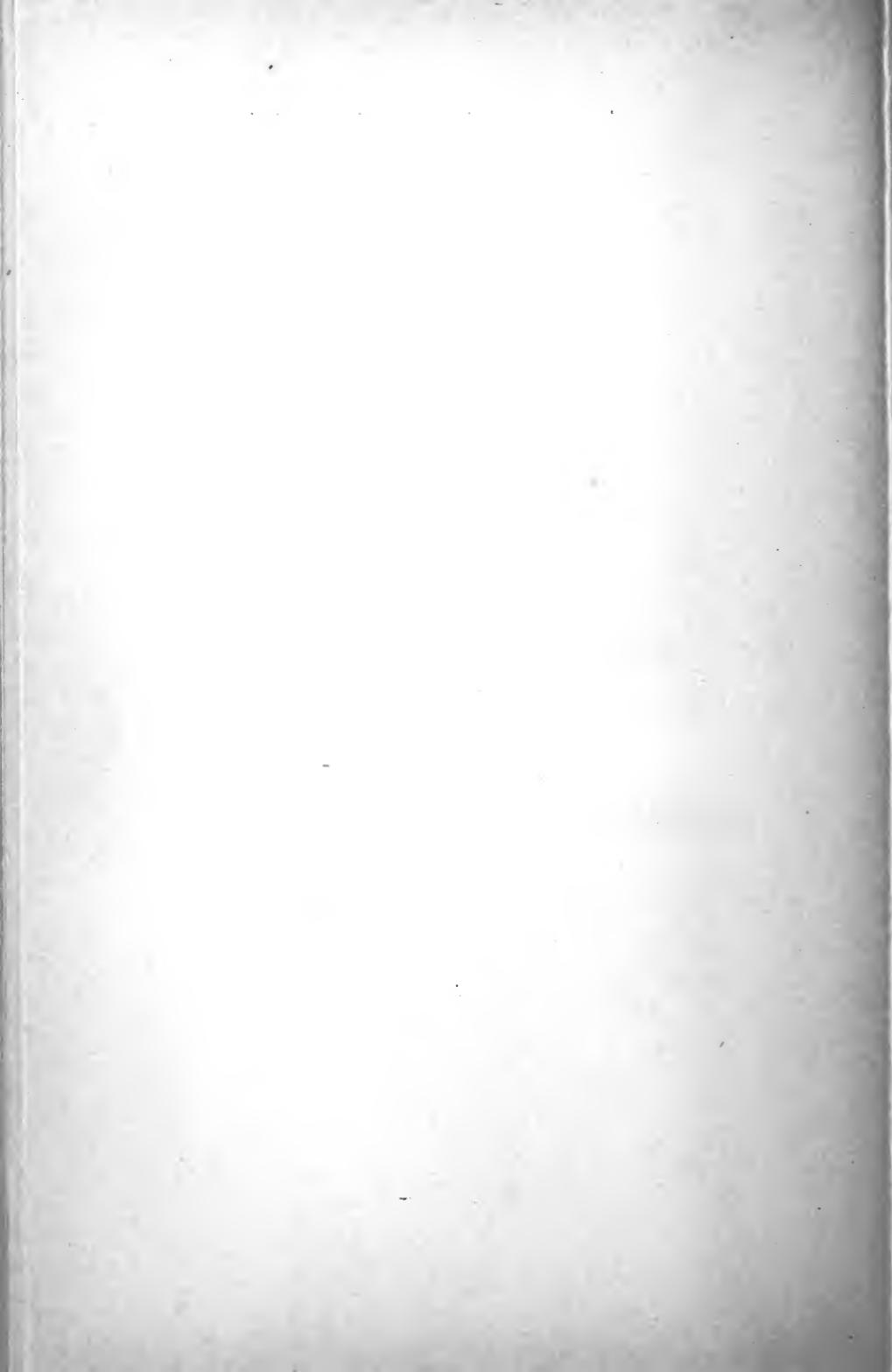
* Deut. 10-22.

such diverse and widely-apart origin would be utterly incredible did we not know it to be, in the documents which are collected as one book in the Bible, the unquestionable fact.

But this is not the full truth on this point. If the Bible were a formal doctrinal treatise, or even if its collected books were a collection of such treatises by different authors in successively different ages, this perfect agreement on points of the most important and fundamental moment would be remarkable. But no reader feels that the original production of it, as a whole or of its separate books, is sufficiently or properly accounted for by attributing it or them to such intent and purpose. There is doctrinal teaching most certainly, and that, as we have seen, of the highest possible importance ; but, essentially and throughout, the Bible is a *historical* book. Even its doctrinal teachings and discussions are primarily historical—that is, they are products of actual experience rather than of abstract thinking, and are addressed by living men to their fellow-men for helpful guidance in daily living. Equally so in the Old Testament as in the New, and in the varied conditions of culture through which the elect people were led in the ages preceding the time of Christ and His apostles not less than in His age and in the light of His revelation. The

agreement throughout is not only in abstract doctrine, but in doctrine applied, doctrine vitally exemplified in the daily practice of actual life. The unity of the Bible, then, is more than doctrinal unity ; there is also in it a unity of historical movement, a perfectly consistent evolution from beginning to end. Each book of the Bible carries on the historical movement in the line of continuous and legitimate development ; so that in reading it we are conscious of a steady advancement, and have a feeling like that of persons who are ascending to the summit of some great mountain, where every step is an uplift, raising them into a region the air of which is felt to be purer and the prospect farther extended and more comprehensive of beauty and grandeur than before.

And, moreover, there is throughout a consistent conception of this perpetually pervading unity ; so that there is wrought in every reader's mind a consciousness of it as binding the ages of all time in one, linking each to each and moving all for one grand final purpose, from the beginning of creation to the end of time, and even infinitely farther, from the eternal beginning "before the world was" into the eternal destinies which are to be "world without end."



THE
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIBLICAL
HISTORY, SIMPLY AS HISTORY.



CHAPTER III.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIBLICAL HISTORY, SIMPLY AS HISTORY.

THE unity of the Bible, as described in our last chapter, being an unquestionable fact, demands explanation as clearly as any other fact in life or history.

It cannot be explained by a supposition of intentional agreement between the several writers, because the wide intervals both of distance and time between the writing of the different books plainly preclude the possibility of personal collusion. It is no more explainable by the theory of fraudulent composition by some impostor of later date, for even intelligent sceptics are forced to admit that this theory is utterly inconsistent with the nature and purpose, the intrinsic character, style, and even the very language of at least the greater part of these books.

The only explanation which meets all the facts of the case is that *the books of the Bible were, in their origin, outcomes of actual history—that is, they are true documentary expressions of such history.*

Just as, in the successive strata of the rocks which incrust our globe, the scientific student finds demonstrative evidence of successive periods in the evolutions of the earthly creation, even so the severally successive books of the Bible are outcroppings, as it were, of stages in the spiritual creation ; demonstrative proofs of its legitimate progress and, throughout, of its entirely consistent unity of purpose under the hands of the Divine Spirit. *The books of the Bible could not have been such as they are, nor the Bible as a whole such as it is, except as a production, in the order of the real development or successive evolutions, of actual historical progress.*

This may be made clear by an illustration. Every one knows the distinction between historical and fictitious literature—that the latter has no basis in fact, but only in the imagination, while the former rests for its credibility and acceptance on its conformity to fact alone. And further, as already shown in the first chapter, the very existence of historical literature depends on preceding history—that is, there must have been actual historical facts before there can be a historical record of them. This is, of course, true not only of records that are purely historical, but also of every department of literature in which facts are the essential basis. To see the truth of this, think for a moment of the

many books that make up what we call our national literature, and it is at once evident that these could not be in existence except as records and expressions of our national life.

For further and fuller illustration, take the great body of our modern Christian literature. How extensive and how multiform it is ! Histories ; biographies ; treatises, philosophical and ethical ; sermons and meditations ; books of hymns and prayers, innumerable—every one an outcome of Christian history, and all, observe, so dependent on that history that not a line or word of their contents could have been written had the actual history not have been, or had it been other than it was. Take the Book of Common Prayer, with the literature clustering around it. Nothing more certain than its existence and its inestimably prized use in the church services of our time ; but it is plain to see that this Prayer-Book could not have been had not the Church been in existence before it, having its services of prayer and praise for which such a manual was needed. And hence we can see that if it were possible that, by some disastrous revolution, our present civilization with all its institutions could be entirely overthrown and swept away ; and if in this dire catastrophe the Church could be utterly destroyed ; and if a new civilization should rise upon

the ruins and continue for a thousand years or more without the least trace in it of such an institution as the Church ; and if, then, by some antiquary delving in the ruins of past ages, there should happen to be found a copy of this old and long-forgotten Prayer-Book—why, even then and under circumstances so little favorable to the conclusion, the very book itself would be proof that it once had a purpose, and its contents would show that this purpose must have been the worship of such a Being as God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—by congregations stately assembling in His name. The conclusion then would be irresistible that there must have been once living such a body of believing worshippers ; that, in other words, such an institution as the Christian Church must have had its place in the actual history of the world. The book would be the palpable, demonstrative proof of the fact.

Now take, in the light of this illustration, our possession and knowledge of the Bible. There has been, thank God, no destructive catastrophe to wipe out of our remembrance the history of the past ; the Book has never been lost, but has ever been kept sacredly in its recognized place of directive authority in every stage of a steadily advancing historical progress. Therefore there is, for a de-

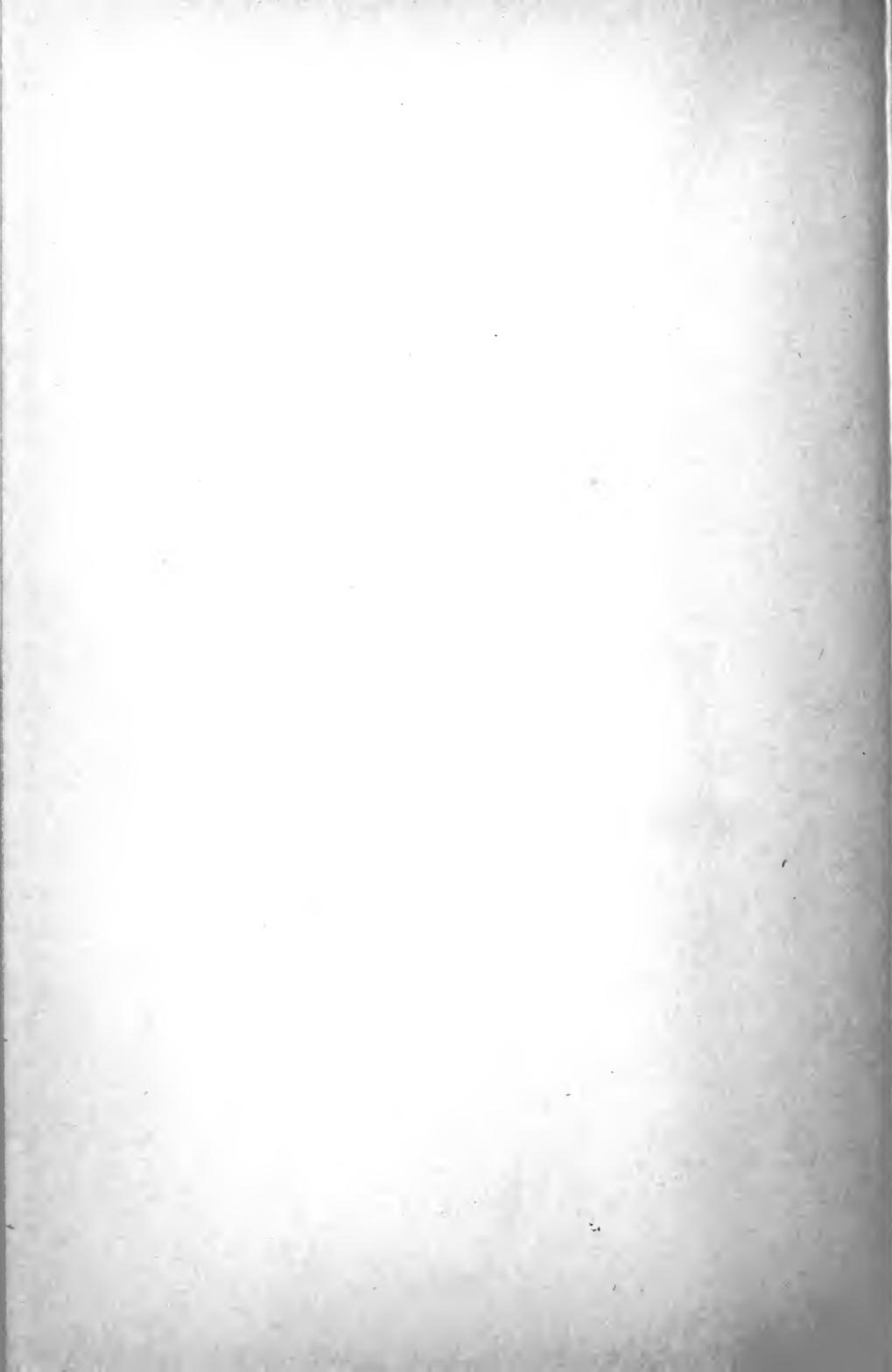
ductive conclusion, an incomparable advantage over the case of the Prayer-Book as supposed ; but with this advantage let the illustration be applied, and who can fail to see the pertinence and the force of it in the one case as in the other ? We have the Bible, this collection of books, in our hands. Its contents throughout show it to be, as its title implies, the Book of books. The first and oldest part of it is, on its face, a collection of historical records relating to a people who were, or at least supposed themselves to have been, specially selected by the Divine Creator of the world to be, above all other people, recipients of special revelations of His righteous will and government. This part of the Bible is neither a poem, like the "Iliad," nor an ideal creation, like Plato's "Republic," nor a fictitious tale, like a modern novel. It is plain history, and that, not merely as historical narrative, but very much more—it is the essential embodiment of history. It is not only the story, but it is the charter of the nation. It includes its constitution and its fundamental laws. It is the body of its authorized records ; the legislation, for both preservation and permanent example, of its founders, of their principles and acts, and of the institutions, both political and ecclesiastical, which the nation had by inheritance from them.

Passing on from this part of the Bible, we have, next, historical records of this people under the government of kings and priests, in the line of direct and legitimate historical development. These books, too, are such in their very nature as to be demonstrative of the actual existence of such a people.

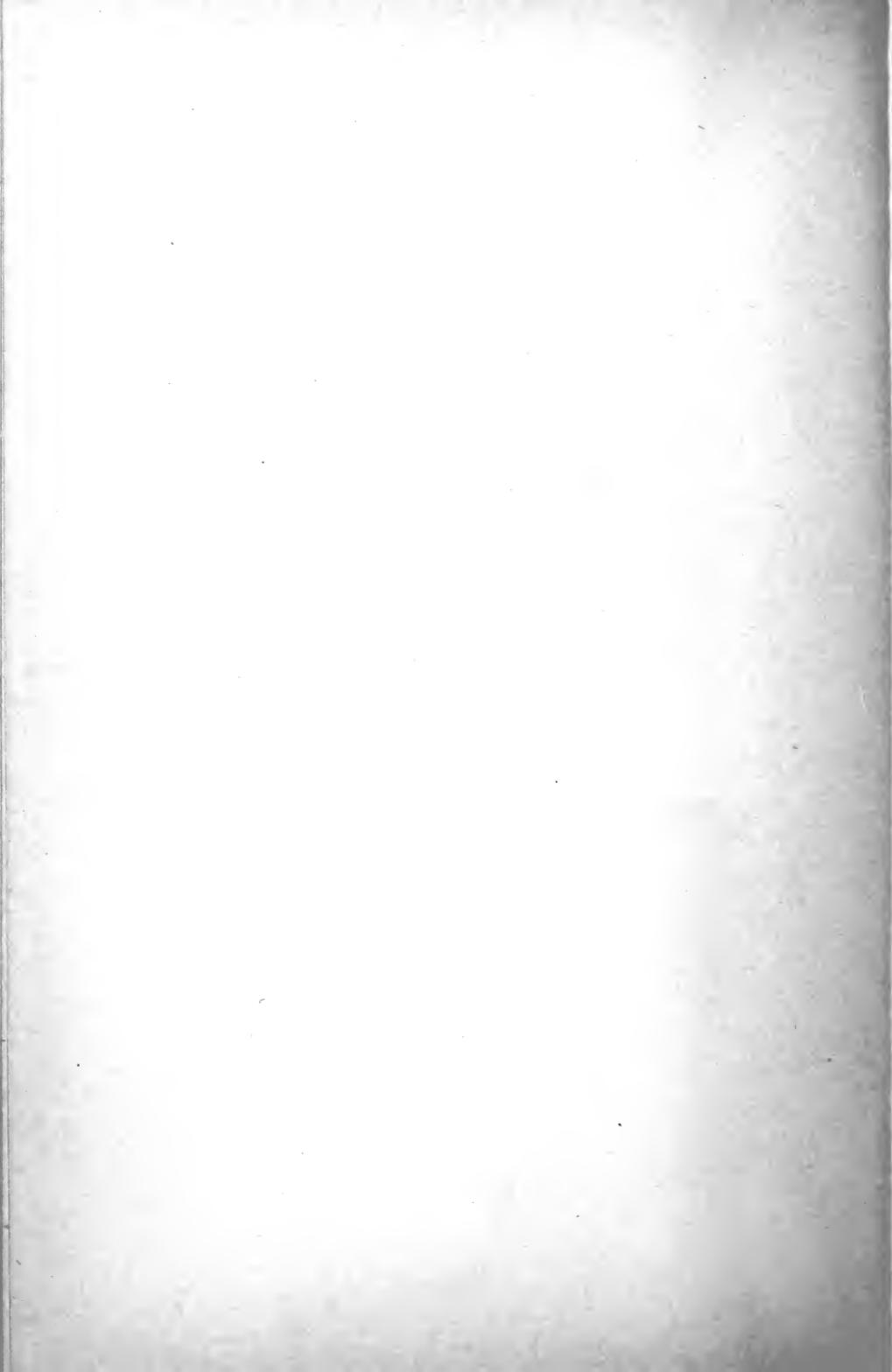
If any explanation short of this could account for the existence of these portions of the Bible which are purely historical in purpose, no shade of doubt can be left when we take into account the later books, the Psalms and the Prophecies. These are the unquestionable formularies of real devotion and the sermons of real preachers. The books themselves are all-sufficient evidence that there was a people who worshipped the God of their fathers after this manner, and to whom the rule of His commandments was the acknowledged law of righteousness.

The conclusion is even more decisively demonstrated in the New Testament. Here we have the most conclusive possible notes of the existence of such a people, with a constitution and habits of life which clearly mark them as lineal descendants of the people who lived under the Old Testament dispensation. Then, in the recorded birth of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, there is indeed a new and most

wonderful development, but it is a development perfectly legitimate and entirely consistent with all the past history. His very lineage is traced carefully in the line of the house of David, and all His peculiar characteristics—all that marked Him as a personage of unique nature and life—are scarcely more remarkable in themselves than in their accordance with the final purpose, in them made apparent, of all the past. The Mosaic history, with all its divinely ordained laws and institutions; the devotional cultus of the Psalms; the marvellous predictions and glorious promises of the prophets—all plainly and unmistakably culminate and have their perfect fulfilment in Him. And though it is true, as even sceptical candor has been constrained to acknowledge, that the consistent delineation of such a Personage by such writers as the four evangelists would be a greater miracle than any mighty thing which they have recorded of Him, and so the Gospels themselves are the most credibly veritable of all history; yet, as if to seal the testimony beyond a possibility of reasonable question, the New Testament canon is not closed until the new life has its consistent development in a new order, in which we have the germs, both doctrinal and institutional, of all Christian civilization, the primary examples of all that is best and truest in the world's history ever since.



THE
SUBSTANTIAL TRUTH OF BIBLICAL
HISTORY NOT INVALIDATED BY
“ HIGHER CRITICISM.”



CHAPTER IV.

THE SUBSTANTIAL TRUTH OF BIBLICAL HISTORY NOT INVALIDATED BY "HIGHER CRITICISM."

THERE is a sense in which it is indisputably true that historical criticism may properly claim the right to treat the Bible as it does all other books. The books of the Bible are historical productions. They were severally written, at different dates, by human authors in the normal exercise of human intelligence and thought. As so written they may and must be tested by the established rules of historical criticism, and there can be no valid objection to the rigid application of these rules for the determination of questions relating to the genuineness, the authenticity, or the general credibility of any scriptural book, or of the Bible as a whole.

Only, it would seem to be too clear for argument that a degree of reverence is due to the position of sacred authority which has been accorded to the Bible in all its parts for many ages, and that criticism should be scrupulously cautious in alleging mistakes or proposing corrections in it. It is not to be *presumed* that the canon of inspired Scripture,

either in the Jewish or Christian dispensation, was made up arbitrarily, carelessly, or ignorantly. Much less is it to be presumed that the recognition of a unique quality of Divine inspiration, which was the determining factor in the original formation of the canon, and which has had the assured assent of men—the wisest and best, the purest, most thoughtful and intelligent almost without exception, of the most civilized—indeed, the only really civilized—peoples of the world for twenty centuries : it is not, we say, to be *presumed* that such recognition has been nothing better than a blunder of superstition. The only presumption in the case is, surely, that which takes in and duly accounts for all the facts in the history as well as the character of the Bible, and gives due weight to all the considerations which have so long combined to sanction its authority as settled in sound reason not less than in faith.

In so far as the "higher criticism" of our time is open to the charge of a predisposition to disregard, and even to treat with supercilious contempt, all such considerations, it is not only, as it seems quite willing to be, offensive to Christian reverence, but untrue to its own principles as well ; since it is certain that genuine historical scholarship demands an impartial recognition of all the factors that have

combined to make up and determine any historical movement which may be under its survey.

The present writer is quite content to leave to competent scholarship the settlement of all questions which are raised in its own lines of investigation, and has not the least fear that any article of religious faith which is worth conserving will be more than temporarily disturbed by thoroughly informed intelligence. But there are certain assumptions just now current under the endorsement of "higher criticism" which are so evidently pre-judgments of determined scepticism, that they should be labelled as such at once.

I. The first of these is the theory which boldly demands the displacement of the Biblical account of the Mosaic economy from its ages-long commanding position in history, and relegates the entire record of the Divine legation of Moses to the realm of the purely legendary.

The first argument on which this theory is based —viz., the assumed ignorance of *writing* on the part of Moses and his contemporaries and the consequent non-existence of written historical documents of any kind, or of any kind of literature in his day and long after—has been conclusively disproved by Professor Sayce in his recent book on the "Higher Criticism and the Monuments," in

which he gives indisputable proof that long before the time of Moses there was in extensive and even popular circulation throughout the whole region between Babylonia and Egypt a body of literature, written on tablets of imperishable clay, and that for the safe-keeping of such tablets many noted libraries were in existence.

A second argument would be inconclusive, even if its premise were granted—viz., that there is no evidence of the observance of the Mosaic institutions among the ancient Israelites for a long period—four or five centuries at least—after the time of Moses; but the premise is not granted. The extreme meagreness of the records of the chosen people's history through all that long period must be taken into account, and no one can consider impartially the evidences of the existence, and of recognition by the people, of Mosaic institutions, which are found even in those records, as shown especially by Dr. Watts and Professor Bissell, without feeling that the assumption of their non-existence is decidedly unwarrantable.

The assumption extends almost as sweepingly over four or five centuries more—even to the time of Josiah—by unqualifiedly pronouncing the books of *Chronicles* to have been worked up by a priestly party during the exile, and attributing to the pre-

exilic prophets ignorance of the entire Levitical system and opposition to the spirit of its requirements. The theory is maintained here by simply throwing all the positive evidence against it bodily out of court, and it is in manifest contradiction to facts which it is compelled to admit as historically authenticated. For instance, there is no question that the Samaritans, in their alienated state after the exile, accepted the entire Pentateuch with veneration for its antiquity and Divine authority equal to that of their brethren in Judea. If, as this new theory claims, the Book of Deuteronomy only had been known before the exile, and that only under a doubtful claim of having been found by a priest in the time of Josiah, after having been lost for centuries, how is it possible to account for the existence of the Samaritan Pentateuch, or to explain the Samaritans' acceptance of it and their adhesion to belief in its Mosaic authorship and Divine authority? Again, it is agreed by all competent scholars that the *language* of the Pentateuch, and of Joshua as well, is not that of the exilic period, but archaic, and unquestionably classic in the Old Testament history. Yet, again, the theory depends chiefly on the silence of the older Biblical records concerning any general or uniform observance of the Mosaic institutions in the pre-Davidic ages, and

even for the subsequent centuries before the exile. That point has been already referred to. But if the Levitical system was devised at the time and for the purpose which this theory alleges, is it possible to account for its character or for some of its leading provisions any more than for its language ? The provisions for the temple-worship and sacrifices may be so explainable ; but what can be said of the elaborate provisions for the years of Sabbatical rest and the general readjustment of property ownership and new divisions of the land in the semi-centennial jubilees ? “ There is no evidence that these enactments ever went into practical effect.” Granted as certainly true not only in the pre-exilic ages, but equally so in the subsequent period ; but the point is, and it is strengthened rather than weakened by this fact, is there any possible way to account for its invention by the priests while in exile ? As an old provision in one of the Mosaic books it may be accounted for, even though there were no record of its consistent observance, or even though its provisions had been for the most part allowed to lapse into desuetude. But what conceivable motive could have prompted the priests in exile to put forth a claim for the ancient existence and Divine authorship of such a system ? Why should they have devised it ? What could have suggested its

provisions to them ? For what purpose and with what possible reason could they have thought of inducing their countrymen to adopt it on their return to the Holy Land ? These and such questions are not to be superciliously put aside. They must be met and satisfactorily answered before the Biblical history can be rewritten on the modern theory, and before the pretensions of this theory to scientific historical scholarship can be accepted as anything better than an unwarrantable assumption.

II. While it is conceded even by the advanced school of sceptical critics that from the time of King David—about a thousand years before the Christian era—the Jewish people may be properly included within the scope of scientific history, it is claimed that the character of David has been so completely reversed in the traditional idea of him as to require the entire history to be rewritten.

It is hardly necessary to state that the traditional ideal is that of a man not without faults, not free from at least one very heinous sin, but of exceptional devoutness and spirituality of temper ; that as such he was recognized in his day as “ a man after God’s own heart ;” was chosen to be the founder of the elect dynasty, the lineal progenitor of the Incarnate Messiah ; was also inspired to be the author of many of the Psalms, and justly en-

titled by his devout interest in the services of the sanctuary, as well as his musical skill and poetic inspiration, to be named the “sweet psalmist of Israel,” and to have the entire collection of the Psalms published under his name. This, in brief, is the ideal of David and of his position in the Bible history, which has been traditionally accepted in all Christendom for nearly two thousand years, and in Judaism for a thousand years before its birth.

Now it is proposed by such claimants to superior historical knowledge and critical insight as Renan, in France, Wellhausen, in Germany, and Kuennen and his reverend (!) followers, Drs. Oort and Hook-yos, in Holland, to dethrone this ideal, and to put in its place the image of a character so utterly diverse from it as to be its entire opposite in all moral and spiritual traits. David, as here portrayed, so far from being eminently spiritually minded, was the “least religious” of all the Jewish leaders or rulers ; so far from being remarkable for his allegiance and devotion to Jehovah, was careless of all worship and ready to acknowledge for a purpose either Jehovah or Baal with equal indifference ; so far from having been an *inspired* Psalmist, he was simply a jovial minstrel who could sing a good song of love or war ; and so far from having been the author of most of the Psalms, it is

doubtful if he wrote or thought of writing even one of them. In his personal life he was, after his boyhood, of which nothing is known, first a dashing adventurer; then a reckless brigand chieftain; and, finally, a brilliant soldier and triumphant king, as jovial as he was successful, and without conscience in the commission of the meanest treacheries or the most flagrant crimes. These are the dark lines in which the portrait of David is drawn by the writers referred to, and with which the later history of the Old Testament dispensation is proposed to be colored and so entirely rewritten.

Now, in the first place, it is to be noted that for a true estimation of both the character and relations of David there is no other source of knowledge than the Bible itself; and therefore the eminent general knowledge of such writers gives them no advantage over those whose study and thought have been restricted to the sacred history alone.

In the second place, it must be conceded that the traditional ideal of David originated, not in the Biblical *narrative*, but in the *actual life* of which that narrative is but a record. So all historical ideals are formed. A man can become an historical personage only by having made his place in the historical movement of his nation and age, so as to be identified with it or with some phase of it. He is

thus in the public eye, and subject to the popular judgment. That judgment is never wrong, at least not in the main and on the whole. Therefore the recorded history, which is its photograph, may always be relied upon for indisputable accuracy, if not in every detail, yet at least in all that constitutes substantial truth. The ideal of David is traceable to the same kind of root, and has attained its growth by precisely the same process and on precisely the same principles that have characterized that of all other prominent personages in history. To say that the true ideal of David is the complete reverse of what it has been hitherto supposed to be is as preposterous as it would be to say that Charlemagne was a cowardly imbecile, Charles II. a saint, or Washington the counterpart of Nero.

But the challenge having been so confidently put to the defenders of the traditionalary ideal, there is a call for a reconsideration of the Old Testament admissions of faultiness in its favorite heroes, and particularly of faults in the character of David, to obviate an unjust impression of their true character and effect.

In the first place, then, the observation which has been often made should be marked with new emphasis—viz., that while the Bible relates, without the least attempt at apology or extenuation, even

the worst faults of those whom in the main it most commends, *it never commends the faults*; but, on the contrary, holds them up for the warning and admonition of its readers, and generally describes the punishment or the penitence which followed them.

In the second place, it is clearly right that allowance should be made for the primitive age and dim ethical light in which the Old Testament heroes lived. The Old Testament history begins in the earliest, most primitive, and rudest age of the world; and it was in such an age, or not very far advanced above it, that the persons lived in whose records we find serious moral blurs. In the days of Noah, of Abraham, of Lot, and of Jacob there had been no authoritative proclamation of the Divine law; the voice of Jehovah had not been heard declaring in tones of thunder the moral obligations of men. Doubtless, as all Christian believers hold, His good Spirit instructed them by His still, small voice, and to His instruction in their hearts, opening them to receive and enabling them to understand the few truths which had been tested in life or handed down as relics of primeval knowledge, they must have been indebted for all their conceptions of righteousness; but it is obvious that knowledge in its crude elements, and with very

little discrimination of principles, was all that under such circumstances they could have attained.

The age of David and Solomon was later, an age of much clearer light and higher privilege ; but the lines of moral discrimination, even in that age, were but dimly discerned. It was neither night nor day. The darkness of pagan barbarism had been dispelled, but the Sun of Righteousness had not yet dawned in His bright effulgence upon the world. The men of that generation had before them the tables of the Law, but they had not the spotless example or the perfect teachings of Christ. Superior, then, as their knowledge undoubtedly was to that of the ancient patriarchs, it was, as undoubtedly, vastly inferior to that of the humblest child of God in the Church now. The Lord Himself implicitly affirms this when He says that John the Baptist was greater than any of the prophets before him, and yet that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

If we would estimate rightly the character of God's ancient servants, we must bear this fact in mind, and make due allowance for it. The wonder then, perhaps, may be not that there were notable defects in them, but rather that they were, for the most part, so free from defect ; that when so little light seemed to be vouchsafed for the illumination

of their path, they should have walked in it, on the whole, so uprightly, with so little of stumbling or turning aside.

Besides this consideration, there is another which is very important, to be borne in mind—viz., *the essential difference between the inspired biographies and others for which special inspiration is not claimed.* The difference is this : Uninspired biographies *describe only the actions* of their subjects, and *ascribe those actions to the best motives* which a favorable judgment suggests ; but the inspired biographies *lay bare the most secret thoughts and intents of the heart, and thus show what the motives in every case really were.* The former represent their subjects as they appeared in the sight of their fellow-men, but the latter represent their subjects as they appeared in the sight of God.

Now we do not hesitate to confess our belief that there is no man, and that from the beginning of human history there never has been one, in whose life the EYE OF OMNISCIENCE, taking in at one glance its whole extent and noting its every act, does not see stains of guilt as dark as any which lies upon the character of even the most faulty of God's ancient servants. Who can look honestly into his own heart and fail to discover astounding depths of iniquity there ? What foul thoughts lurk in its

dark caverns and rise up when opportunity prompts to assert their dominating power—thoughts full of all uncleanness and maliciousness, fornication, adultery, wrath, revenge, murder ; are they not all there ? And has not every one sometimes cherished and indulged them ? They may not, indeed often the worst of them may never have ripened into action. Lack of opportunity, or the fear of consequences, or pride, or the final triumph of principle, may have kept them down ; but who has not felt them ? who is not stained with the guilt of them ? Such thoughts are not seen by other men. No one would have them seen or known for the world ; and yet they do really have place as essential elements in the character, and in the Eye of Omniscience the guilt of them lies upon the soul. There is no one who has not cherished them at some time or other ; no one probably who has not on some occasion admitted one or another of them among the motives of his action. It may even have happened that some of our actions which have been applauded, or would have been if seen by others, as eminently good, have really been for this reason, because springing from such motives, exceedingly vile.

The true claim, then, for the biographies of the Old Testament Scriptures is that they are true to

human nature, in that they portray not only the acts of their subjects and ascribe them to the best motives which the judgment of charity will permit, but lay bare, as with the finger of the Omniscient Judge, the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts, and show accurately how those thoughts developed into action and shaped the life. And the difficulty which we have in passing our human judgment upon the true relative standing of such characters as are portrayed in the Bible is a difficulty of personal experience—a difficulty which has its application to the inmost secrets of our own hearts no less than to the records of the Book which claims for its Author Him by whom the heart is thoroughly known.

There can be no possible doubt of the thoroughness of such disclosure in the Bible record of the life and character of David. Every act and incident in his career, from young manhood to old age and the final end, is included in it and fully related. His every fault, his every foible is searchingly exposed. There is in his biographers an equal readiness to put him into the light of the most transluecent scrutiny when deserving of disesteem for indiscretions, blame for follies and faults, and even deep condemnation for heinous sin, as when most exemplarily fulfilling the high ideal of the

"man after God's own heart;" and by his heroic magnanimity, his unequalled fervency of devotional sentiment, and unparalleled zeal in the service and for the honor of God, justifying the high estimation in which he is represented as standing before God and men.

The record of his great crime—the crime which, in our sight, casts its dark shadow over his whole career, and so terribly baffles our capabilities of just discrimination in weighing his character—makes its exposure as searching, as unreserved, as thorough as can be conceived to be possible even in the final Judgment Day. From the first instigation of lust by a casual glance, through every stage of its secretly cherished development, and by every step that was taken for its unhallowed gratification, even to the final culmination in a deed of direful and damnable wickedness, the entire transaction is laid open, and every secret in it, as seen by the eye of God Himself, is unreservedly brought out into a thorough exposure of its criminal blameworthiness.

But it is a very significant fact that David's sense of guilt in the case, according to the same record, was extremely imperfect; so much so, that his conscience appears to have been entirely easy until his righteous instincts were roused by Nathan's parable of the man who had robbed his neighbor of

his one ewe lamb, and guilt similar to that of such a deed was charged directly upon David by the prophet's declaration, "Thou art the man." It would be incredible that one living in our time and under our degree of moral light could have been so insensible of guilt in the commission of such an act. But we must remember, as already observed, how imperfectly the lines of moral discrimination had been drawn in the time of David, and to this consideration we must add another which is of great weight in the case—viz., the fact that *the right of an Oriental monarch to the persons and lives of his subjects, with scarcely any limit of accountability, was then universally admitted.* The true reading of the case then comes out, and the moral insensibility of David in this instance stands for us as a very notable example of an imperfect stage in the education of the human conscience, and it also affords a very striking proof, additional to many others, that the prophetic sense of righteousness in the Old Testament economy was derived from inspirations of a Spirit of holiness infinitely superior to any possible instinct or impulse of the *Zeitgeist* of that age.

Our conclusion, then, must be that the entire record of the life of David presented in the Old Testament justifies the traditional ideal of him,

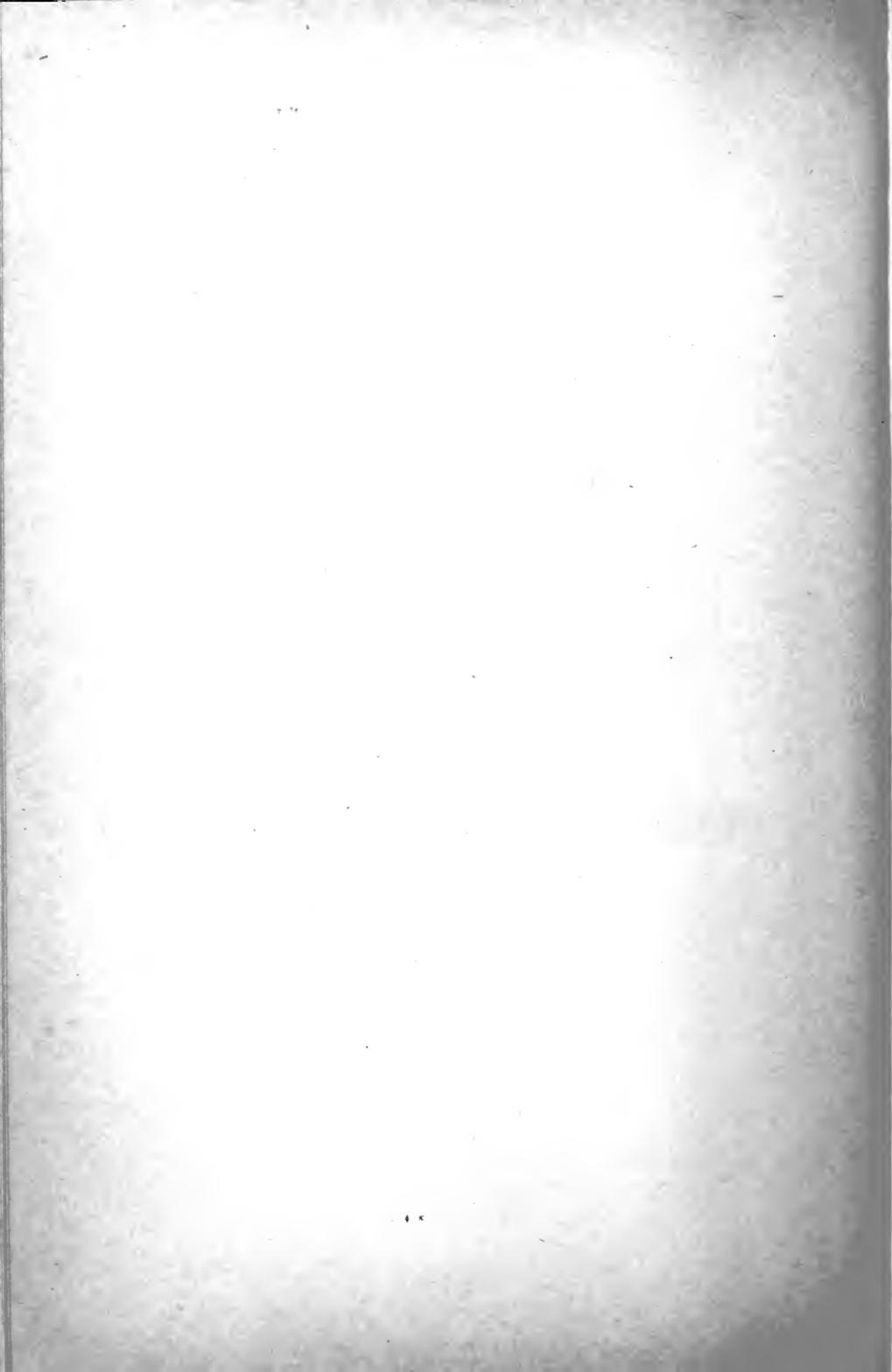
since we have therein an eminent example of one living in an age of crude ethical discrimination, and not superior to it in his natural perceptions, yet of remarkable genius for spiritual insight and poetic expression ; of extraordinary capability for heroic achievement ; of magnanimous impulses and of great personal magnetism, chosen by Divine grace for special instruction and inspiration, by the guidance of which he was brought to see himself with an insight more nearly Divine, and became a preacher of righteousness not only for his own generation, but for all time. While the Book of Psalms has for many generations borne his name, it has never been supposed, even in "traditional orthodoxy," to have been originally composed in its entirety by him. Many of the psalms have from the first been plainly ascribed in their very titles to other authors ; and it is a fair subject for critical investigation whether the greater part of the psalms, or even a very large proportion of them, were his personal composition. But whatever may be the final result of such investigation, it is not to be decided by offhand objections to the traditional authorship, much less by wholesale claims to nineteenth century infallibility in determining exactly by its microscopic critical sagacity the original authorship, motive, and age of every word of the

Psalms, or indeed of any part of the Bible. Certainly, the reasons which have thus far been adduced in the processes of "higher criticism" are not sufficient for reasonable doubt, much less for denial, that the traditional ascription of the authorship of many of the psalms to David was made rightly and on valid ground in the first place, or that his extraordinary spiritual insight and poetic skill, combined with his eminent opportunity for ordering the psalmody of the sanctuary, were an ample justification for publishing the entire collection of the inspired psalms under his name.

That the fifty-first psalm was originally an expression of his sense of personal guilt, when his conscience had been quickened after his great sin, has never been doubted until very recently ; and much more conclusive reasons than those which criticism has yet adduced must be given before his authorship of it can be pronounced disproved. As the Psalm of Penitence, what an inspiration it has been ! what an uplift it has given ! what relief it has afforded ! what light it has brought to myriads of sin-stained and burdened souls in every generation since his time ! Who can doubt the genuineness of the penitence which found its expression in such language ? Who can wonder that the prophet of the compassionate God who willeth not the death

of a sinner, but had rather that he would turn and live, after having brought him to see and acknowledge the iniquity of his sin by the convicting charge, "*Thou art the man,*" was also authorized to make to him the gracious announcement, "*The Lord hath put away thy sin!*"

THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT HISTORY.



CHAPTER V.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.

IT should be distinctly observed that the assumptions discussed in the last chapter are not those of higher criticism in any proper sense of the words. They are simply, as already said, assumptions of predetermined scepticism. The legitimate work of higher criticism is not here questioned. The scholarship which leaves no secret of the past undiscovered and counts nothing too remote to be investigated is worthy of all honor. It is especially worthy of honor when it is the result of lifelong study devoted patiently and reverently to the investigation of the historical origin of the books which have come to us under a unique claim to Divine inspiration, and to a thorough analysis of the process by which this claim has been authenticated and sealed. But it is not superstition, it is simply truth of feeling and perception, which recognizes the ground thus trodden as holy ground, and a spirit of profound reverence is surely a becoming—shall we not say an indispensable?—qualification for any one who assumes for himself the

place of an expert to survey it and determine its value. Entirely aside from any claim for such reverence, which may be made on the score of religion, it is as indispensably essential in a true historical spirit ; and equally indispensable would seem to be a combination of both historical and spiritual insight, to perceive and feel in their true relations all the factors in its original consecration, and which, in legitimate evolution, have secured its recognition as sacred ground ever since. Criticism, when rooted and grounded in such scholarship and maintained in such spirit, may legitimately raise many questions and suggest many points for reconsideration ; and there is no danger that the foundations of faith will be undermined or seriously disturbed.

Whatever reasons for doubt concerning the authorship or original date of any part of the sacred Scriptures may be found by such reverent and scholarly criticism, this much for the substantial historical veracity of the Old Testament may be considered as settled beyond possible controversy : that it is, as a whole, absolutely demonstrative in evidence of the existence, in the early ages of the world's history to which its records belong, of a people who were, or at least supposed themselves to be, under an economy of special covenant with God, and, as such, made recipients of special reve-

lation of His nature and will. To our personal faith there is no need of the qualifying clause—"or at least supposed themselves to be"—in this proposition ; for, to our mind, the proof is conclusive that the supposition was firmly grounded in fact. But leaving such proof out of present view, it may confidently be asserted that the proposition as it stands is indisputable.

Taking, then, the existence of such a people in the past as an assured historical fact, there can be no question of the importance of determining, if we may, whence the belief that they had been singled out for such an economy originated ; how it must have affected their national consciousness ; and how it did, in fact, differentiate them from the rest of the world, making them both in consciousness and fact "a peculiar people !"

It will not do, as Renan and others of like sceptical temper have done, to say that their belief concerning their relation to the Deity was simply their national phase of a common superstition in their time ; that Jehovah—or, more properly, Yahveh—was simply their name for the Divine Being whom they supposed to be their local or national guardian among the celestial powers. It will not do because it is not true. It is not consistent with a fair acceptance of historical evidence or an honest inter-

pretation of historical documents. Nothing in history can be more certain and nothing more indisputable than the fact that the revelation of Jehovah, as represented in the Bible to have been made to the Jewish people and received by them, was a revelation of God as the absolutely Supreme God of the universe, the ONLY LIVING and TRUE GOD, whose perfectly righteous sovereignty is over all from the beginning, and who will not divide His glory with another. This is the doctrine, not of one leader, but of every one in ancient Judea—of lawgiver, prophet, priest, psalmist, poet, and moralist alike ; not of one stage in their historic evolution, but of every stage, from the earliest beginning of their recorded history to the very end.

Now the Hebraic conception of God stands absolutely alone in ancient history. No trace of such a conception can be found in the literary or monumental remains of any other ancient people. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others are clearly proved, by modern discoveries, to have been not devoid of religious faith or unaccustomed to the expression of religious sentiments and affections in appropriate acts of devotional worship ; but the god of their worship is always found to be a local divinity. Their piety never gets beyond the conception of God as the tutelary divinity of

the nation. A slight trace of faith in God as the Supreme Being has, indeed, been thought to be indicated in the name which stood for the father of gods and men, in both the ancient and the classic mythologies ; but we look in vain for influential tokens of such faith in the national consciousness, or proofs of it in their actual history.

It is only in ancient Israel that we do find it, and there it is fundamental and everywhere dominant. Whether in the prophetic or the Mosaic or even the patriarchal eras, the characteristic mark of this history, its inspiring principle, we might even say, the very reason of its being, is faith in God, the Supreme Being, Creator, and Ruler of the universe. The foundation source of all their knowledge was the sublime sentence, “ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” If their father Abraham was believed to have been selected by special Divine favor, and taken into a special covenanted relationship with God, it is by the same only Supreme God, maintaining the same sole sovereignty over all the nations of the earth, that this covenant economy was understood to have been constituted. “ When Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, I AM GOD ALMIGHTY ; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and

thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . Behold, My covenant is with thee, AND THOU SHALT BE THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham ; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee.”* And yet again, “The angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, . . . that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ; and in thy seed shall ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH be blessed.”† If it was believed that a still further and much fuller revelation of God was made to Moses five centuries later, under a new name, there was no thought of any other than the ONE SUPREME GOD as the Author of this revelation, and the new name was not for a moment understood to denote another god, but only to betoken the heritage of special grace, into which the seed of Abraham were now admitted under a national constitution and government of laws which Moses was authorized to establish and promulgate.

* Gen. 17 : 2-5, Revised Version.

† Gen. 22 : 16-18, Revised Version.

“ And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM : and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel . . . The Lord, THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, OF ISAAC, AND OF JACOB, hath sent Me unto you : this is My name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel, and say unto them, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt ; and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”* “ And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I AM JEHOVAH : and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, AS GOD ALMIGHTY, but by My name Jehovah I was not known to them. . . . Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments : and I will take you to

* Ex. 3 : 14-18.

Me for a people, and I will be to you a God : and ye shall know that I am Jehovah your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob ; and I will give it to you for an heritage : I am Jehovah.”*

Whatever may be the final conclusion of criticism concerning the true date of the original composition of the Pentateuch, or any part of it, will not alter or disprove the fact that when the religious faith and worship of the nation is determinable by the canons even of criticism itself, its relation to God as the Supreme Being is found to be in exact accordance with these expressions ; nor only this, but with a tradition settled and unquestioningly accepted, that such had been its relation from the first, and was then determined by revelation, as here recorded.

The prophets not only called upon the people, constantly and with every form of emphatic speech, for devoted allegiance to the worship and service of Jehovah as God Most High, Almighty in universal sovereignty, but appealed without admission of possible doubt to their own consciences for recog-

* Ex. 6 : 3-8, Revised Version.

nition of the peculiar obligation to such allegiance, which the recorded special revelations had held the nation to from the very beginning. It was sufficient for them to appeal to the religious consciousness of the people, traceable to this original inspiration ; and the charge that they were untrue to it was the most convicting reproof which the prophetic zeal for purity of faith and worship could allege against their idolatrous propensities. Indeed, the very fact that idolatry was accounted a *sin* in Israel was in itself a proof of their admitted obligation to the worship and service of God as God alone. The nations around them having gods many and lords many might, without blame or inconsistency, join with one another when in friendly alliance in the religious rites supposed to be pleasing to their several national divinities, and any one of them might admit into its pantheon the god or gods of a subjugated people among the other legitimate fruits of conquest, their theory being that the tutelary divinity of their own nation was proved by the victorious result to be stronger, but not therefore more divine than the god or gods of the nation which had been compelled to yield to its sway. But in Israel there was never for a moment an allowed acceptance of the heathen faith or worship. From the first it was fixed in the national consciousness that every

species or form of idolatrous worship was a *deadly sin*, which Jehovah could not look upon with the least degree of allowance. It is admitted, even by the critics who would be most disposed to minimize any fundamental distinction between the religious attitude of Israel and that of other ancient nations, that “Israel had no mythology,” and that “we have neither the slightest trace in Israel of Jehovah’s being regarded as a *primus inter pares*, nor of His having a consort, as Baal had in Astarte.”* The fundamental law of faith and worship for all Israel was ever that which was held to have been given as the first commandment of Revelation : “I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt have none other gods but Me.”

In this respect Israel stood always and everywhere a nation apart. It always had and never lost this characteristic and fundamental distinction from all the rest of the world. On the common ground of historical life the lot of Israel seems to have had no special advantages ; it was simply that of one of the smaller nations of the world, such as the Ammonites or Moabites, and its people had to experience the common vicissitudes of historical development. They might associate and mingle with other

* Stade, as quoted by Professor Robertson, “Early Religion of Israel,” p. 299.

people in commercial intercourse or political alliances ; they might be “scattered and peeled” among nations foreign and even hostile to all their customary ways ; might, at times, be almost lost in the absorbing pressure of such foreign life, with all its influences ; but this one characteristic they never lost : the GOD OF THEIR FATHERS ever remained, in their faith and worship, the only Lord God, and to acknowledge any other being in all the universe as God beside Him was but idolatry, the most heinous and degrading of deadly sins.

This, then, is the fact which demands acceptance, and requires to be accounted for. The “critical” theory, though compelled to accept, does not account for it. It is not theory, however, but historical fact with which we are concerned here ; and it is fact indisputable on the accepted principles of historic certitude that the Hebrew monotheism had this unique character and attitude in contradistinction from the theism of every other nation in the Old World.

This characteristic, it is to be carefully observed, was not only their belief in the Divine oneness and universal supremacy, but also in the essential, universal, and undeviating *righteousness* of the Divine Being and government. The gods of the nations were, for the most part, as enormous in their pas-

sions as in their strength. The theistic conception of paganism everywhere was almost devoid of the ethical element. Its deities were supposed to be good to their devotees, and were therefore worshipped ; but their goodness was not that of essential virtue, but simply special kindness to their favorites. The most monstrous and atrocious vices were attributed to them without the least thought of inconsistency. And so, even in their worship, rites of impure and debasing lust had their place, and the foulest wickedness in the worshippers was not supposed to lessen in the least the favorable acceptance of them in the sight of their god.

But the Hebraic conception of God was essentially and fundamentally ethical. The perfect righteousness, the absolute and undeviating holiness of Jehovah was a truth as fundamental in the national consciousness as His universal sovereignty. To say that holiness was in the Hebrew mind a recognized characteristic of Jehovah would be a very feeble assertion of the fact. It was recognized not only as a characteristic, but as an essential attribute, eternally identical with His very nature. No shade of iniquity could be possibly associated with Him. In Himself and in all His manifestations and administrative acts He was the very ideal, essentially and eternally, of perfect righteousness. And con-

sistently in all His requirements, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," was the recognized fundamental condition of acceptance in His sight, whether for worship or for conduct in all the actions and intercourse of daily living.

There can be no question that in holding and maintaining this exalted conception of the nature and character of God, ancient Israel stood absolutely alone among all the nations of the Old World. It was by this peculiarity of their theistic faith that they were kept ever, in every vicissitude of their national history, a "separate and peculiar people," irreconcilably separate in all their religious devotions, and peculiar in the maintenance of at least an ideal standard of immeasurable superiority in practical ethics, even though their attainment was confessedly short of it to a grievous extent in actual personal living.

Now the problem which an honest student of history has no right to evade is how to account for this unique characteristic. The question to be answered is, Where did Israel get this grand theistic conception? May we not say rather, Whence and how came to Israel this *knowledge* of God? this true knowledge—knowledge which has been verified and confirmed in all human civilization, concerning the nature and will of the Almighty Father, by

whom this world and all worlds have been created and are governed.

It is a favorite theory of some among those who profess to be "higher critics," that in its theism, as in all other respects, the Hebrew history was, like other histories, simply an evolutionary development. They tell us that in the early days, and even down to the time of the prophets, the Israelites were, in their religious ideas and practices, very much like the other small nations of Palestine, such as the Ammonites and Moabites; their God, Yahveh, being to them very much what Moloch and Chemosh were to these neighboring peoples, except that Yahveh was more selfish in his local favoritism than either of these other deities, and that the higher conception was a later evolution in their theistic history. When we ask for the causal influence of this particular development in Israel, and why nothing like it is found in the neighboring nations, the only answer given is that it is traceable to no special influence, unless it be to a special genius for religion, which the Israelites seem to have had and the others lacked. Why even this peculiar genius should have taken such an immeasurably exalted leap after ages of national training in low and base superstition, and at a time when they had reached a stage of their history most de-

pressed, there is no reason given by that class of these critics who take pure evolutionism for the only law of historical progress. Others, however, seem to themselves to find the sufficient cause in the preaching and writing just at this point of the religious teachers who were known as the prophets ; but here again the proposed explanation signally fails to explain. The ethic monotheism of Israel is carefully labelled "the prophetic conception ;" but special Divine revelation to the prophets being at the same time as carefully denied, and the records of the preceding Mosaic and Abrahamic revelations entirely rejected, it is impossible to see whence the prophets got their conception, or by what influence they were inspired ; if, indeed, their inspiration in any true sense can be admitted.

Now it is certain that the only historical documents, or records claiming to be historical, which we have as bearing upon this point, are those which are contained in the Old Testament. It is equally certain that the explanation which they afford is, in contrast with any such hypothesis, entirely sufficient, leaving ground for no other possible question than that if they be historically true. This explanation, which, however, it should be distinctly observed, appears in the sacred volume not in the form of an explanation, but simply of *historical*

record, is that the Hebrew conception of God was specially inspired by direct revelation from God Himself ; that such revelation was made, first, to the founder patriarch, Abraham, at a later age to Moses, and afterward to the other prophetic leaders and teachers of the nation. It is unquestionable that this explanation, as we have it, has the form and character of historical narrations. And since the question at issue is an historical one, this is not to be overlooked. The “critic” who claims to have found a sufficient explanation of this unique conception of the Divine nature and government by pronouncing it an invention of “the prophets,” may reasonably be asked why “the prophets” should have put forth their invention in writings purporting to be the documentary annals and laws of the nation from its very foundation, centuries before their time ? Nor only this, but to have made the appeals which they undeniably did make to the national consciousness for verification and acknowledgment of the historical truth of their claim that Jehovah, the Lord God Almighty, had, through all the nation’s history, been known to be the only living and true God ; and to have put the charge directly and boldly to the conscience of every individual in the nation, that the Israelites were false to their own traditions and their lifelong

religious convictions in recognizing any being as Divine but Jehovah alone ? How could the prophets have expected that such an appeal and such a charge would be accepted by the people ? And how is it possible to explain the indubitable fact that they were so accepted, if the Jehovah of the prophets were not recognized and acknowledged by the people as none other God than He unto whom alone they and their fathers had always been taught to render worship and service ?

These questions do not touch the literary details with which linguistic scholarship may legitimately occupy itself. The objections against the so-called "critical" theory of the Israelite history does not require an insistence upon the historical accuracy (in accordance with our modern historic sense) of every part of the Pentateuch or other pre-prophetic books of the Old Testament as we now have them. But they do call for an honest application of the admitted principles of historical science to that history, and in such application seem to leave no room for any other conclusion than that of the assured admission of the substantial truth of the Biblical records.

It is a late age to ask, as if the question were a new one, in precisely what way do these records represent the revelation to have been made ? But

there are pressing reasons in our time for considering this question with renewed interest, and there are some peculiar advantages in its scientific attainments for a discriminating consideration of the subject which have been wanting in any previous age. Particularly is this true because of its advances in physiological and psychological knowledge, as well as of its explorations in the fields of archæology and history. In all ages, from the very first, it has been held to be the fundamental truth of the case that the special revelation of God consisted in a direct communication from God Himself to the chosen human recipient ; that this was true alike in relation to Abraham and Moses as to the prophets. But possibly it has not been sufficiently noted, or not noted with sufficiently discriminating emphasis, that the Biblical records describe each of such special Divine manifestations as having been made in a different way. To Abraham it is stated that the Lord *appeared* and *talked* with him ; once “in a vision ;”* but repeatedly by “coming and standing before” him. To Moses, while the statement is made again and again that the Lord “spake unto” him and “said” the words which are recorded, yet that in the first revelation to him the

* Gen. 15 : 1.

Divine manifestation was by a flame of fire in a bush that was not consumed, and a Voice calling out of the bush to him by name and declaring, “ I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ;” yet charging him when he turned aside to see God, “ Draw not nigh hither : put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”*

And many years afterward, long after Moses had become familiar with Divine communications, and it had even been said that “ the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend,”† it is yet recorded‡ that the Lord said unto him, “ Thou canst not see My face : for man shall not see Me, and live,” and that he was only permitted, as a very gracious response to his most earnest and persistent entreaty that he might see God, to behold not His “ face,” but only His “ back ;” and that only after special preparation, by being put for protection in a cleft of a rock and covered with the Divine § hand. To the prophets the Divine communications came “ at sundry times and in divers manners.” To Samuel, in a dream of the night ;|| to Elijah, by a “ still, small voice ;”¶

* Ex. 3 : 1-6.

† Ex. 33 : 11.

‡ *Id.* vs. 20.

§ Ex. 33 : 20-23.

|| 1 Sam. 3 : 1-10.

¶ 1 Kings 19 : 12.

to Zechariah, by “the angel of the Lord ;”* to Jeremiah, by a vision in which the Lord “put forth His hand”† and touched the prophet’s mouth ; to Ezekiel, by “visions of God,” in which he saw the “heavens opened” and the “appearance of the likeness of the glory of God ;”‡ to Isaiah, by a “vision,” in which he “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphism : each one had six wings ; with twain He covered His face, and with twain he covered His feet, and with twain He did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of His glory ;”§ to Hosea and other prophets in such wise that the message which they severally proclaimed might be affirmed without a doubt on their part to be “the word of the Lord,” yet with no explanation of either the manner in which the revelation was made or the tokens by which its Divine origin was assured.

Now, in considering these various descriptions of the manner or manners in which it pleased God to communicate with His chosen prophets by special revelation, we must bear in mind that they were written many ages before the birth of all that is

* Zech. 1 : 9. † Jer. 1 : 1-10. ‡ Ezek. ch. 1 and 10.

§ Isa. 6 : 1-4.

known to us as modern science. The wisest men of that period knew almost nothing of natural forces or laws ; they had only the scantiest and crudest knowledge or conception of natural elements ; they had not learned the distinction between processes or effects which are material and those which are purely spiritual. Obviously, then, they had in their speech no terms to express such distinction, and of necessity must, in describing either the one or the other, have used terms which to us are confusing and very hard to analyze. When we try to get from them a true conception of the precise way in which the Divine revelation in any case was made, we need to free our minds, as far as possible, from the limitations of their terms of literal description, and reach for their meaning by an earnest and persistent endeavor to put ourselves in mental attitude as nearly as we may in their place. In this attitude, one point which has not been sufficiently regarded in many theories which have been and still are held concerning both revelation and inspiration should be clearly understood as fundamental—that is, *the absolute prohibition in Hebrew law of any formal representation of Jehovah, or the thought of any possible likeness to Him in the image of any person or thing in the created universe.* Therefore, when Moses and the other

prophets use anthropomorphic terms in recording Divine revelations, when they speak of God as “seen” by them in the form of man or angel, and of God as “coming” to them, “standing” by them, “putting His hand” upon them, and “talking with” them, “face to face,” it is certain that they used these terms only because they had no other for either their own idea or the apprehension of their contemporaries, in designating the fact of a Divine revelation as having been made to them. They “saw” God most certainly, and “heard His voice ;” but it was with the mind’s eye that they saw and with the mind’s ear that they heard ; and this they knew as well as we. But the distinction was understood by them implicitly rather than explicitly, because neither in their speech nor their philosophy had the terms of the distinction between physical and mental action been apprehensively enunciated or formulated.

This limitation of their capability of expression, however, does not detract in the least from the historical truth of what they certainly intended to relate—viz., that the chosen leaders of Israel did receive special revelations by direct communication from God Himself, in which He quickened their spiritual apprehension with such a perception of His glory in the perfection of holiness

as had never been granted to mortal on earth before.

This is the fundamental fact in the history of ancient Israel, and without the admission and recognition of it there is no possibility of accounting for the unique attitude and character of that nation in the history of the world. From first to last the obligation because of it to worship and serve Jehovah as the only living and true God was the controlling principle of the Hebrew national life. It is, indeed, to be admitted that both the rulers and the people of the nation were in many instances false to their elected position ; that there was a besetting fascination for them in the lustful indulgences of idolatry, to which the surrounding and at times commingling peoples were addicted. But they do not seem ever to have entirely lost the consciousness of their election, much less to have denied or doubted the fact of Jehovah's revelation of His power and Godhead to their fathers. To this consciousness the prophets uniformly appealed without the least apparent apprehension ever that the appeal would not meet with a response of spontaneous assent. Their call upon Israel was never in behalf of a religion that was in any sense or degree a new religion to them, but always and without qualification for allegiance to the God of their

fathers, the God who, from the time of their fathers, had been known as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God by whose sovereign authority Moses had proclaimed : “ Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,” and whom from the earliest consciousness of their individual lives they had known and worshipped as the only living and true God.

The history of ancient Israel, then, was demonstrably attested as an inspired history throughout, its inspiration being traceable for its original source to direct revelation from the Infinite Creator and Ruler of the world. It is true to say that the *history* was inspired, for its entire movement was actuated and dominated by the principles of faith and devotion toward Jehovah as the revealed God of the universe. The least that can be said of the Old Testament records is that they are substantially historical, and this can mean nothing less than that they are substantially true.

It has been believed for many centuries, in both Christendom and Judaism, that the Biblical books, which are in part the historical records and in part expressions of the devotional life of ancient Israel, and which, as a whole, constitute its collected and accredited literature, were productions of authors who wrote them under a special kind of inspira-

tion. Many have held this point of faith, as if it must necessarily include the opinion that these writers were *exclusively* inspired, and so inspired only or chiefly for the very purpose of writing these books. But there is no substantial basis for this theory. The prophets and psalmists were undoubtedly men whose spiritual life was on the mountain-top of inspiration ; above all others in the nation they had an assured consciousness of living communion with the living God. Therefore it is clear that they must have enjoyed the highest degree of inspiration, and there can be no doubt that, through them, we have the purest breathings of the Divine Spirit. It is reasonable also to suppose that the historical collections of the elect people, stamped as they are with credentials of their acceptance by that people from ancient times as historically true, would not have been left without some special guardianship of the Spirit of truth. But it is the deeper truth that the primary seat of the inspiration was in the very history itself ; and in a certain sense, and that a true sense, it may be said that the whole nation was inspired. As Moses could say with truth, at a time when Israel was still in the crude civilization of nomadic life and so little taught as to be easily seduced by false teachers, “ The congregation is all holy, and the Lord is among them ; ”

so, it might be said, the congregation is all inspired, and in their assembly is the dwelling-place of the Most High. Yes, this was the grand truth which was the inspiring principle in the whole life, and constitutes the key to the entire history of ancient Israel. For this, to bear witness to it, to maintain it, to tell it out among the nations, to carry it forward in the world's history till the times of preparation should be fulfilled, when all the world might be called to a knowledge of God and salvation through faith in Him who is the very Way, the Truth, and the Life, might be offered freely to all mankind—for just this Israel was chosen to be “a peculiar people,” and its prophets, leaders, and teachers were inspired with a knowledge of the Most High, incomparable in clearness and truth of perception above the highest thinkings and speculations of the wisest sages of the Gentile world. It need not and ought not to be imagined that Israel was alone under Divine guardianship, or carried forward in its history alone under Divine direction and toward the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. It need not and should not be supposed that the Divine Spirit withheld His inspiring influences from the hearts and minds of all the rest of mankind, necessarily involving the monstrous conclusion that all that was true and good in the ancient Gen-

tile civilizations were from some source absolutely independent of if not hostile to Him as the Spirit of truth. Rather, let it be clearly understood and admitted that there can be no possible enlightenment of mind or elevation of heart in the world at any time or anywhere which is not of God and in God. Let it be admitted, as Clemens Alexandrinus in the second century and Abelard in the eleventh did not hesitate to admit, that the Greek philosophers as well as the Jewish prophets might be truly said to have been inspired ; and let us not hesitate to add this might equally be said—nay, it *must* be said—of all the masters of all true teaching, whether it be of poetry, of philosophy, of science, as well as directly and specially of religion, because there can be no truth which is not the offspring of Divine intelligence. But still the conclusion will remain that the inspiration of Israel was unique—unique in true distinction from all others in ancient time—because of its origin, historically traceable in special Divine revelation ; because of its being purely a spiritual quickening for the perception of the truth of Divine righteousness ; and, lastly, because it was in the direct line of preparation for the full Revelation of God promised and perfected in the face of His Son Jesus Christ.



THE
WITNESS OF HISTORY TO THE DIVINE
PERSONALITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY TO THE DIVINE PERSONALITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to a long era in human history, during which it was believed by the people of one nation that God, the Sovereign Creator and Ruler of the world, whom no man hath seen nor can see, had, by a special revelation of His nature and will, taken them into a direct covenanted relationship with Himself, and that under the terms of this covenant they were constituted the commissioned conservators of the knowledge and worship of Him on earth, and witnesses to His righteous government among the children of men.

There is, however, no warrant in these Scriptures for the inference that this covenanted relationship was occasioned by any such local or racial favoritism as was attributed by other nations of antiquity to their tutelary gods. It appears rather to have been a stage in the Divine education of mankind, a part of the disciplinary process by which the human family over all the earth was to be made ultimately

capable of receiving and apprehending a saving knowledge of truth which is heavenly and eternal. This was not always clearly understood by the elect people, but it was the doctrine uniformly and consistently of their leaders and teachers. In the very beginning of their national history, when the announcement was first made to them of their Divine election for so peculiar a place and purpose among the nations of the world, it was on record that they were clearly forewarned against the flattering assumption that they were entitled to such distinction because of any special meritoriousness on their part in the Divine sight ; and it was in uniform consistency kept constantly before them, and urged with never-failing earnestness upon them by their prophetic teachers, that the prerogatives of their election were much more those of responsibility than of favor, and were intended to be a token and proof of the Divine regard in its ultimate scope, much more for all mankind than for them exclusively.

So that era was, in the very terms and purposes of its constitution, educative and disciplinary, and therefore it could not be final, but was predestined to close with the attainment of its object. Therefore it was throughout essentially prophetic, looking forward always to and yearning for a dispensa-

tion of the last days, when all the kingdoms of the earth should be recognized as kingdoms of the Lord and His anointed, and all people over all the earth should be accepted on equal terms as alike entitled to His great salvation.

No one in Christendom needs to be told that the era in which we are living, and which has been in existence now for nearly two thousand years, is one of such admitted universal right to Divine guardianship and favor in complete fulfilment of the ancient prophetic expectation. The New Testament Scriptures, which are the authoritative records of the way and means in and by which this marvellous world-wide change was effected, have their place, therefore, for us as an added volume of Holy Writ, and are believed by all Christians to be the fullest and final expression of the Divine Spirit for the saving enlightenment of the human family on earth.

If we had not a lifelong familiarity with the fact, it would strike us as a marvel almost beyond possibility that a volume which had held so long its unique place of sacred authority for the teaching of Divine truth, with its infallibility thoroughly accredited, could have been superseded by new writings. And certainly it would have been impossible had there not been an actual historical evolution, of

which the new writings were the true exposition and expression.

It is certain beyond a possibility of doubt or question that the new era was brought into effective existence by the teachings and life of a Jewish peasant, from whose birth it dates its beginning, and from whose Person it takes its name. No fact of history is so indubitable, so absolutely sure as this. Religious scepticism has, indeed, sometimes tried to speak in doubtful tones concerning the historical verity of the personal life seen and known among men as that of Jesus Christ ; but the intelligence even of infidelity itself has refused to recognize the doubt as tenable on any substantial ground, and has repudiated the attempt to account for Christianity without Christ as but a stupid conceit of ignorance itself. So absolutely dependent on Christ, so vitally identified with Him in His own personal life and as exemplified in His own words and deeds are all the distinctive characteristics of the Christian civilization, that the profoundly learned and thoughtful Baron Bunsen has not hesitated to declare that “even were we destitute of that which we actually possess—a veracious tradition respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the history of His three years of public teaching—a glance at the mental development of humanity during the

last eighteen centuries would compel us to assume the existence of some singularly exalted, holy personality as the cause and not simply the occasion of that revolution in man's view of the universe."*

The faith of Christendom has long been settled in the only warrantable conclusion, that such world-wide and time-enduring vitality must be more than human, and therefore that the man whose personal life was so demonstrably the fountain source, in ever-abounding fulness of its power, must have been more than man. Since His life was so unquestionably complete a manifestation of the Divine in human form, there must be as unquestionable reason to say of Him in very truth that in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

A conclusion which has been ratified by the undoubting assent of more than fifty generations would seem to be settled beyond reasonable question ; but in these last days, when every point in religion is open to free discussion, there is a small but self-confident school of sceptical thinkers who fancy that it may be evaded by a new theory. Their theory is that the Personality, which has been the real vital force in all the progress of Christendom, is not and has never been the historical Jesus of

* *God in History*, vol. iii., p. 7, by Baron Bunsen. S. Winkworth, translator.

Nazareth, but rather an ideal Christ, which the faith of Christians has persistently identified with Him. Those holding this theory are earnest in asserting their acceptance of the historical evidence in proof of both the existence and the moral perfection of Jesus as a man, but yet more earnest in disbelieving Him to have been in any true sense more than man. He was, they say, "the flower of humanity," and so, worthy of the admiring love and devotion which have been accorded to Him through all the Christian ages; but still only a "flower of humanity," a typical example of human nature at its best, and in nowise different from the rest of mankind except in the excellence of His human character.

This theory is a complete reversion of cause and effect in history, since it puts the ideal in the place of the Person with whom it is identified, and at the same time denies to that Person the characteristic qualities which alone rendered the ideal possible.

The ideal conception of human perfection is a combination in imagination of all the best qualities of human nature in perfect vital symmetry. It need not designate any individual as its personal subject, but may be a purely abstract conception of the imagination. But this is not the way in which *historical* ideals are formed, nor is it supposed to

have been the way in which the ideal of Christ was formed on the theory under consideration. It is admitted that from the beginning of creation down to the introduction of the Christian era in the life of Jesus, there had been not only no actual realization of the ideal in any human life, but also that the life which He lived and the doctrines which He taught were transcendent in heavenly qualities far above the moral and spiritual conceptions which mankind had before entertained or been capable of forming.

The ideal here, therefore, originated in the excellency of the actual personal character. This was admittedly so pure and spotless, so pre-eminent in qualities admirable and lovable, as to have drawn the hearts of men to Jesus—first, of His personal followers, and afterward of multitudes through their representation—as they have been attracted by no other person in human history. And so, as time went on, the perfection of this character has been more and more contemplated, and in the contemplation more and more admired, and in the admiration exaggerated, until it came to be taken as altogether superhuman, and Christian believers would consent to no other explanation of its excellency than that Jesus was not only the Christ of prophecy, but verily and indeed God IIimself, mani-

fest in the flesh. "This ideal of Christ," says one of the leaders of this sceptical school, at least in this country, "is not the historic Jesus of Nazareth. Two thousand years have been at work on that ideal, and all the finest and highest thinking of the ages since that day have been at work reshaping, purifying, lifting, beautifying that idea."**

Now, without denying at all the idealizing activity which has been at work upon the character of Jesus through all the Christian ages, it is perfectly clear that His character in His actual personal life was the original basis of this ideal. The growth of the ideal, even though it be a growth, had yet its genuine root in His pre-eminent virtue. Now the truth, which has been realized by the great body of Christian believers, is that *unless Christ had been from the first believed to have been a person and to have led a life of Divine origin and nature, the ideal of Him which has obtained in Christian faith would have been utterly impossible.*

Let us consider this.

In the first place, then, it is admitted by all, sceptics as well as believers, that in the ideal of Christ which has uniformly prevailed, the chief reason for His pre-eminent attractiveness has been

* The Irrepressible Conflict between Two World Theories, by Rev. J. Minot Savage, p. 52.

His perfect exemplification of benevolence in absolute unselfishness. There can be no doubt of this in the ideal. But how is it possible to identify this ideal with the historic Jesus of Nazareth, unless His actual life had been as fully and truly Divine as it is represented in the New Testament record ? Divest that life, as these theorists would divest it, of all that marks it in the evangelical record as Divine, and what have we left as a basis for the ideal ? In the life of a Galilean peasant—thirty years in the obscure privacy of His parents' village home and three years as a wandering preacher—what was there, in condition or act, to mark Him as the unique example of self-sacrificing benevolence ? He was poor ; but so are the unknown millions of every generation. He was for the three years of His wandering life without a home, having not a place that He could claim as His own to lay His head ; but myriads of homeless wanderers—we might even say, in simple truth, of tramps—have been in like privation and need. He was amiable in all His personal intercourse, ever ready to meet the needy and the suffering with sympathetic words and helpful deeds ; but denying and excluding His miraculous beneficence, what recorded act in all His life is found to mark Him as the exemplar of self-sacrificing benevolence ; or, indeed, as an ex-

ample of benevolence in any way distinguished from the many who are proved to be kind and sympathetic wherever and whenever there is human need?

No. The plain, undeniable truth is that if Jesus were a mere man, there was no act of His recorded life to show that He was or could have been regarded as a man in any way distinguished for pre-eminent goodness. Granting that He was not only amiable, without a taint of malice, but also so free from notable fault of any kind that He might safely put the challenge, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” yet even in that respect His character was not apparently so superior to many others as to have marked His life as exceptional, much less as unique. Goodness is not pretentious; it vaunteth not itself; it proves its blamelessness, not by extraordinary manifestations, but simply by fitly meeting each little occasion in every-day life; and there were, no doubt, many a man in Christ’s day, as there certainly are in ours, of whom it could in truth be said, even by his most intimate companions, that they had never seen a fault in him, and yet have been without the least claim to distinction.

What was it, then, in the actual life of Christ that made Him, first, in the eye of His personal followers, and ever since in the judgment of the civilized world, the personification of self-sacrificing

benevolence, the very type of the enthusiasm of humanity? Is it claimed that it was the altruistic tone and spirit of His teachings? Granting all that can be said in appreciation of the helpfulness, the uplifting, the ennobling, and exalting character of the doctrine which came from His lips, as well as of the originality and winning attractiveness of His "method," the requirement of the case is still not met; for the ideal of Christ is not only an ideal of a teacher, but the ideal of a person, emphatically and uniquely of a person. It has been said over and over again, and repeated so often simply because it is so emphatically true, that Christianity is not a philosophy, but a life; and this is as true of its originating ideal as of its exemplary adaptation in present experience.

There is yet another element in the ideal to which the unparalleled hold of Christ upon the grateful love and devotion of mankind has ever been chiefly due, which is equally dependent on faith in His Divine nature, and impossible without it. By every Christian believer, through all the Christian ages, the uppermost thought in the contemplation of Jesus Christ, and His claim to perpetual and universal gratitude, has ever been the thought of Him as *the suffering Saviour*. But how could this thought have originated, how could it ever have

found place in the ideal of Him, if Jesus had been supposed, from the first knowledge or impression of His earthly life, to have been only a man ? In that case there could have been no possibility of attributing to Him any special condescension or voluntary self-renunciation in His low estate, His privations, or even His persecutions. He was but a peasant of Galilee, and His poverty was but the common lot of His class. If He met with opposition from the rulers of the nation in His public ministry, this was only what might reasonably have been looked for by one making and publicly asserting his pretensions ; and even His final trial and execution was but a contingency, the risk of which He might have been willing to run for the sake of the temporary notoriety and influence which His claim to the Messiahship had secured. It is shocking to Christian sensibility to speak in this way of Him whom Christian faith ever regards as the adorable Redeemer ; but there is no possibility in reason to see how He could be spoken or thought of otherwise, if He were not believed to have been of celestial origin and Divine nature. As man merely, His claim upon the homage and devotion of other men, or even their common gratitude, would be and must from the first have been felt to be decidedly inferior to those which had for cen-

turies before His day been accorded by millions in the great Indian Empire, still further east, to their reputed Messiah, Gautama ; for the record of the life of that Eastern sage was one of poverty, of lonely wanderings, of pure self-abnegation, of thought only for others and goodness toward others, not surpassed in the recorded personal ministry of Jesus, and far exceeding it by many years in duration ; and he was, at the same time, the undisputed son of a prince, to whom therefore all this privation and suffering were the voluntary assumption of his own purely unselfish benevolence. Even in their own national history, the people of whom Jesus was born and among whom He lived had an example of a suffering prophet with which that of Jesus could bear no comparison. Jeremiah, in their historical record and tradition, had for centuries held the place of the great sufferer, and with unquestionable reason. In the faithful execution of his Divine commission to "pull down, pluck up, and destroy," for more than forty years he was subjected, by God-defying rulers and a rebellious and stiff-necked people, to persecutions, to indignities, privations, tortures, incomparably more protracted and unendurable than any which the record or tradition connected with the experience of Jesus ; and, in the final end, the image of Jeremiah stoned

to death by his countrymen, violently denouncing him as a blasphemer, was quite as replete with the pathos of humiliation and pain, to entitle him to be regarded as the great sufferer, as that of Jesus expiring, by sentence of Roman law, on the cross.

No ; it could not have been possible for such an ideal as that of the Christ, the Saviour of mankind —Saviour not only by the purity of His life and the beneficent character and tendency of His teachings, but also and even more truly by His personal condescension, humiliation, and suffering—it could not have been possible for such an ideal to have been formed on the basis of the actual character and life of Jesus of Nazareth, unless He had been, from the first, believed with assured faith to have been more than man. The voluntary condescension which was attributed to Him was such as no earthly king could claim to parallel ; but it was possible—possible in Him or possible its grateful recognition by Christians believers—only on the assurance of a well-grounded faith in His eternal and Divine pre-existence. The suffering, with the endurance of which His image has ever been stamped in the mind and heart of Christendom, could not have been attributed to Him unless His Person had been enshrined in the faith of Christendom as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins

of the world, the Divine Redeemer, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." "He hath reconciled us in the body of His flesh, through death, to present us holy and unblamable and unreprovable in His sight." It is because and only because the trusting faith and grateful and loving adoration of Christian hearts has ever found true expression in such utterances as these that the ideal of the typical Sufferer, with whom no other in all history could for a moment be thought of as comparable, has ever been, in all ages and among all people, in the light of Christian civilization, accepted as identified with Jesus of Nazareth, and possibly identified only with Him.

Now, it is certain beyond question that the ideal involving this identification had taken possession of

the mind of incipient Christendom before the books of the New Testament were written, for it is very clear that the Christ of the ideal is, in every characteristic and feature, the Jesus of Nazareth whose person is portrayed and whose acts and teachings are recorded by the evangelists. That these evangelists were the personal followers and friends of Jesus ; that they knew Him very intimately, and had full and accurate knowledge of His life in all its aspects and relations ; that their purpose, in all sincerity, was to represent Him just as He appeared and approved Himself to be in His actual life, and therefore that the impression of Him in their narratives is an accurate reproduction of the impression which was made by Him in person upon those who lived with Him and knew Him, are conclusions which are justified by every accredited test of historical evidence. But even if the authenticity of the Gospels were not so abundantly substantiated as it is on historical ground, their historical truth would still be determined beyond question by the accuracy of the correspondence between fact according to their history and the ideal, which could have had its basis only in such fact. The Person whose character and teachings are portrayed in their historical narratives is beyond question the personality of the ideal. The only alternative possibly ad-

missible in the case, therefore, is just this : either they or some equally illiterate persons, shortly after the death of Jesus, created the ideal, or else the Gospels are accurately true to the life. If we give the preference to the first of these alternatives, we are met by all the improbabilities which were felt and admitted to be insuperable by one so indifferent to faith and inclined to sceptical speculations as Rousseau, when he wrote, in his "*Emile*," his well-known expression of the impression made upon him by the evangelical records : "It is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction and strangers to the morality contained in the Gospel. The marks of its truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero." To adopt the other alternative, and to hold an assured conviction that Jesus was, in person and character, exactly what the evangelists represent Him to have been, and therefore Son of God and man, perfect in both His Divine and human natures, is but to give our honest and reasonable credence to fact, which more than any other fact or series of facts in history has the attestation of all the credentials by which historical truth is demonstrated, ac-

cording to the rule for such demonstration as formulated by Mr. Huxley : “ The occurrence of historical facts is said to be demonstrated when the evidence that they happened is of such a character as to render the assumption that they did not happen in the highest degree improbable.”

Yes, the faith of Christendom is not only a religious, but as truly a reasonable faith. It is not mere pious sentiment, much less is it fanatical credulity. It is grounded in thoroughly substantiated historical fact—fact which lacks no point of evidence by which the truth of history is universally admitted to be demonstrated. It is justified by the well-considered, sane, sober judgment of the most honest, intelligent, and acute thinkers and scholars, with very few exceptions, in all the Christian ages. It is the formulated consensus of millions upon millions of rejoicing believers, in accumulating numbers, out of every nation and race, as time since the day of Christ has gone and continues to go on. There are, it is true, as there have been in every generation of the past, some who can persuade themselves that the evidence is insufficient. There will always be, no doubt, or at least until the fulness of the predicted time, when there shall be none to say, “ Know ye the Lord,” constitutional sceptics, and those whose

educational bias inclines their minds more to a consideration of the difficulties of belief than to a due appreciation of the reasons for faith ; but still the clear, positive, unfaltering voice of history concerning Jesus Christ has been in all the ages past, is now, and is certain to be in all the future, “Truly, this man was THE SON OF GOD.”



A LIVING CONSCIOUSNESS OF COMMUNION
WITH THE LIVING GOD—THE GOD OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OF LOVE—
THE PRESENT NEED OF THE
CHURCH, AND ITS TRUE
INSPIRATION.



CHAPTER VII.

Conclusion :

A LIVING CONSCIOUSNESS OF COMMUNION WITH THE LIVING GOD—THE GOD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OF LOVE—THE PRESENT NEED OF THE CHURCH, AND ITS TRUE INSPIRATION.

IT has been the single aim of the author in the preceding chapters to make it clear that the history which is recorded and exemplified in the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments is true history, which means simply that there has been, in the actual life of the world, such an era, with such a people, under such government, and led and taught by such persons as are described in the books of the Old Testament ; and that the era in which we are now living had its origin in the Person whose history is recorded and whose teachings are correctly reproduced in the New Testament.

We have said but little of the special inspiration of these books. But this must not be understood as implying that we are in doubt concerning such inspiration. We would as soon think of doubting

the poetical inspiration of Homer, Dante, or Milton, or the dramatic inspiration of Æschylus, Sophocles, or Shakespeare, or the philosophical inspiration of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Kant, as of doubting the religious inspiration of Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament, or of the apostles of Jesus Christ under Him as their Lord and Master, and through the enlightening guidance of His Holy Spirit, in the New Testament. If there are persons who deny or doubt this inspiration, they simply illustrate the possibility of abnormal dissent from the general consensus of both Judaic and Christian intelligence ; it proves such persons to be lacking in the religious sense and spiritual perception, just as the failure of one to perceive the inspiration of the masters in poetry and philosophy would prove his lack of the poetic or philosophic sense. The inspiration of sacred Scripture, in the religious sphere of thought and feeling, has long since been settled by precisely the same tests, and there is no derogation of due regard for dogmatic authority in saying also it has been determined in the same way. It was the general consensus of the Jewish mind, under Divine illumination, that determined belief in the inspiration of the books admitted into the Old Testament canon ; there is no trace of such determination by synodi-

cal authority. The same consensus of Christian thought and feeling in the early centuries of Christendom determined belief in the inspiration of the books in the New Testament canon. Possibly, probably as some think, the use of the word "canon" by the early Christian writers was inherited from the usage of the Alexandrine grammarians, "who designated by the term such of the classic authors as they judged to be models of excellence."^{*} Certainly there was no synodical authority till very near the close of the fourth century, when the Council of Carthage decreed that no books should be read in the congregations of the Church, "under the name of Divine Scriptures," except those which we now have in the Old and New Testament canon.

But whatever opinion may be held concerning the method of scriptural inspiration, or the precise ground on which its authority is to be recognized, is of comparative unimportance. The inspiration of the sacred books is not of the letter, but of the spirit. Before the inspiration of the books, or even of the authors of these books, was the inspiration of the *actual history*, which is traceable to positive Divine revelations; and these books are

* Professor Ladd, *Doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures*, vol. i., p. 638.

true, or truly inspired, only as they are trustworthy records and expressions of such revelations.

This being taken as true historically, it follows as an assured conclusion of faith that God, whom no man hath seen nor can see, but who made the worlds, and in and by whom we and all things consist, has never left Himself without witness in this world of ours. Having made us for Himself, He has endowed us with a religious sense, with spiritual instincts and aspirations, to lead men everywhere to feel after Him, if haply they may find Him. He has endowed man with reason, to see in His works evidences of His existence and His government of the world. He has given knowledge and wisdom by His good Spirit, enkindling intelligence, quickening a sense of right and wrong in good and honest hearts, and animating such hearts with yearning desire for true knowledge of Him and communion with Him.

But, over and above all this, He has constituted for Himself a chosen body of witnesses, to receive and preserve His special revelations of saving truth, to instruct and discipline human society in the knowledge and practice of it, to bring all mankind within the enjoyment of its enlightening, purifying, and uplifting influences, and to carry forward the great human family through the life of this lower

sphere, in steady advancement toward fully developed fitness for the eternal life above, which is its true destiny.

This body, under the old dispensation, was the chosen, covenanted people, organized as the nation of ancient Israel ; and to it was specially committed the revelation of *His personal nature and His absolute and eternal righteousness.* “Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servant, whom I have chosen : that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He : before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord ; and beside Me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shewed, and there was no strange God among you : therefore ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God.”*

No other religion in ancient time had such a conception of the Divine nature or the Divine government. The religions of the ancients that are known to us were inspired chiefly by a sense of man’s wretchedness under the ills of life, its calamitous and destructive adversities, rather than by a conviction of its sinfulness or aspiration for perfect righteousness. The religion of ancient Egypt seems to

* Isa. 43 : 10-12.

have looked chiefly to consolation by counteracting care against the destructive effects of the great final catastrophe. Their principal ritual was known as *the Book of the Dead*, and in both its doctrine of metempsychosis for the soul and its elaborate methods for embalming and entombing the body, it provided, as far as priestly doctrine and rites can provide, against the destruction of either the physical or spiritual parts of man's nature. The religions of Persia and farther India were directed exclusively against human suffering and sorrow, and in the one case prescribed for consolation a philosophy of dualism, and in the other, of complete extirpation of sensibility to evil by the subjugation of personal desire and will. In neither of these does there seem to have been any formulated apprehension either of righteousness, as conformity to the perfectly and eternally righteous nature and will of the sovereign God, or of sin, as treason to Him and rebellion against His supreme dominion. In later times the Greeks had no sense, or at least no formulated sense of righteousness other than as conformity to harmonious truth and beauty, and no sense of sin other than as unseemly divergence from such conformity and ungraceful violation of its principles. In the Roman religion the theory of righteousness was simply that of obedience to the law of

the State, and of sin as treason simply in that sense and relation. But to ancient Israel was committed the revelation of God as a Personal Being, and of the fundamental principles of righteousness as His law ; and the one purpose of their history seems to have been the education of the human conscience in a clear recognition of the fact that this world is, in very truth, a province of the Divine government, and the inspiration of men with a true sense of their obligation to conform in all its relations to the Divine will and aim for the promotion of the Divine glory.

When the fulness of time had come, the revelation of the great salvation, for which this educational history had been appointed and carried forward, was made in the Person of the Only Begotten Son of God, by a real participation and experience of human life, with its infirmities, and of death, with its natural consequences and its redemptive deliverance. In His life and teachings the revelation of Divine righteousness was supplemented by opening the minds and hearts of men to see and feel the fulness of grace in the Divine love. He maintained, without abatement of one jot or tittle, the perfection of the law in its own intent and purpose ; He, more clearly than any before Him, asserted and insisted upon a standard of absolute sin-

lessness as the only standard possibly consistent with the essential and eternal perfection of the Divine righteousness ; but in entire consistency with this standard brought out—so brought out as to stir the minds and enkindle the hearts of men in its apprehension and to flood the world with its light—the glorious truth that God can be just and yet justify the sinner. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* This was His message, this constituted His great revelation. The apprehension of the truth of this, as exemplified in His Person and expounded and illustrated in His teachings, was at once felt to be, and has, in fact, proved to be the salvation of the world.

So the Christian Church took the place of ancient Israel as the Body of Witnesses for God in the world. Such it was recognized and appointed by the Saviour Himself to be, when He gave the great commission to His apostles by which they were to go forth and convert the world ; for just as in the old dispensation it had been said by Jehovah to the elect people, “Ye are My witnesses,” so now He said to them, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me ;”

* St. John 3 : 16.

and though this was spoken to the apostles directly, it was clearly not intended to be limited in its application to them personally, but rather was said to them as representing the perpetual and universal ministry of the Church ; for He added, “ In Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

This, then, is the special function of the Church, to be in the world, everywhere and in all time, the authoritative witness for God in Christ, to bring all men to the knowledge of Him and salvation through Him.

This means to witness, first, to the truth as it is in Him, to tell it out among the heathen and all people till the end of time, that the Son of God is come and hath given unto us eternal life by the remission of sins. In bearing this witness, the Church stands before the world with a claim to accreditation which is indisputable. It holds from Christ Himself the commission to go into all the world and preach His Gospel ; it has been constituted for this purpose the “ pillar and ground,” the conservator and herald of the truth which that Gospel comprises in its fulness, and it traces its title to this commission in historical lines and by

* Acts 1 : 8.

historical evidences which fully meet all the tests that are universally accepted as demonstrative of historical certitude. These evidences are, moreover, so interwoven with the threads and identified with every shade of history as to be not weakened, but accumulatively strengthened in the long progress of time. We, who have our place in this generation, at a remove of nearly two thousand years from the original grant of the commission, can bear our testimony with the confident conviction of being sustained by more than fifty generations of authorized and accredited witnesses, and in bearing our testimony we can feel that we are but uniting with the acclaiming voice of this mighty host in confessing the incarnate Christ as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ; for it is ever to be remembered this faith, though thoroughly accepted by us individually, is not our individual faith. It is the faith of the great Body, which we have received from the Body and through participation in its life. In confessing the faith we give utterance to no new creed. We recognize the fact that it is the creed which not only we, but our fathers also, and their fathers, and fathers' fathers through the ages all along have believably repeated as the declaration of faith in Jesus Christ. So our belief in Christ has come to us in such wise that it

necessarily involves the holding to this hereditary line of its transmission, and every generation since the time of Christ on earth has received it, whether by birth or conversion, under the same necessity and obligation. If it be thought that the first century was exceptional in this respect, that in tracing up the line we reach there an arid and dark waste of a hundred years more or less, wherein no trace is found, it must be remembered that there never was or could have been a moment when the Christian faith was proposed to men other than as a historical faith, and never a person received into the Christian Church otherwise than by a baptism which meant for him and was received and recognized by him as putting him into a real vital connection with Jesus the Christ, who had been born by Divine incarnation into the world and had lived, died, and risen again for its redemption. But to witness for Christ means more than to bear an evidential witness. It is a witness, even more explicitly and emphatically than that of the elect in the elder dispensation, to the Divine righteousness. "Think not," said the Lord Himself to His disciples—"think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."* And yet further,† " Whosoever there-

* St. Matt. 5 : 17.

† *Id.* vs. 19, 20.

fore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The revelation of Divine grace which was made through Him did not, in any particular or degree, detract from the sense of Divine righteousness which it had been the purpose of the old economy to educate in the human conscience. Far, indeed, from this its purpose and effect. It magnified the law, and made it honorable. It sealed and fixed, beyond the possibility of change or unsealment in the conscience of mankind, the conviction that the righteousness of God endureth forever ; that it is as absolutely immutable as the very nature and being of God Himself. It showed not only how infinitely above any possible touch of wrong or impurity that righteousness is in its essential qualities, but also how thoroughly searching and all-including are its requirements, piercing even to the joints and marrow, and trying the very reins of the heart. So the Christian Church came for this purpose, with more accredited authority and far more

effective power, into the place of the elect people, and continued and fulfilled the function with which that people had been charged of old to proclaim and to vindicate the righteousness of God in the world. But over and above all else, the witness of the Church for Christ means the accredited assurance which it was commissioned to give to the world and show forth in it, of the infinite fulness of the Divine love. It is impossible for us, whose lives have been from the first dawn of our consciousness in the full light of this glorious truth of the Christian revelation, which, by reason of this, distinguishes Christendom from the world in ignorance of it and even from the people to whom were granted the partial disclosures of the Old Testament revelation. The thought of God to the heathen mind is emphatically thought from the visions of the night—dim, dark, and terrible ; the thought of a power unseen, unknown, and possibly hostile and destructive. Even in the Jewish mind it was the thought of a Supreme Almighty Monarch, who is righteous indeed, but who can by no means clear the guilty. If this conception was relieved by gleams of the Divine mercy, the relief was only partial, and hardly realized in the consciousness ; the dominating impression was still that of the Sovereign, High and lifted up, before whom even

archangels veiled their faces, and who could not look on iniquity with the least degree of allowance. But in Christendom every little child is taught at its mother's knees to look up and say, "OUR FATHER, who art in heaven," and the thought of God as our Father, our gracious, merciful, all-loving Father, who has proved His love to us by giving His only Son to die for us, is the thought of Him which is most spontaneous in every Christian heart.

Glorious, indeed, the message with which the Church of Christ is charged, and sublime its mission to proclaim that message in every generation till the end of time for the salvation of the world ! It would be this if the testimony which the Church has to bear were only that of a witness to past revelations ; but its function is far higher, and charged with infinitely more vital power. The Church is not only a witness for Christ, but it is, in a true sense, the Body of Christ. In it He still lives in human society, and by its ministrations still does His mighty works among men. In the ascension withdrawal of His visible presence He gave His disciples most explicit assurance of perpetual continuance with them by His indwelling Spirit—an assurance demonstratively fulfilled by irrefragable proofs, both visible and invisible. The religion of Christ is, therefore, in the fullest possible sense of

the words, a *living* religion. His disciples are charged not only with the commission to be the heralds of it, but with vital capacity and consequent obligation to demonstrate its power as well as its truth by actually living it. The Body of which they are members is His inspired Body, and every member, even to the least and lowest, has life in vital communion with Him through His indwelling presence and by the very breathing of His Holy Spirit.

Now, what we especially and most urgently need in this generation of the last days is a true, living, and realizing sense of this grand Christian privilege and obligation. We hear complaints on all sides of the decadence of faith in our time. Not always in a tone of complaint, but quite as often apparently of exultation, it is said that the historic Christian theology has had its day, and dogmatic faith has lost or is rapidly losing its hold on the minds and hearts of men. If so, or so in very considerable degree, the reason is not, as is often alleged, in the advancing scientific intelligence of this generation. It is not occasioned by new discoveries of weak points in the Christian evidences or detection of unscientific flaws in Christian doctrine. It lies much nearer home ; it touches the very principle of our religious consciousness. It is a decadence not

simply of *belief*, but of *real faith*. It is a spiritual blindness to the realities of the spiritual world, because of the fond closeness with which we hold continually before our eyes the things which are palpable in the world of the present. Mr. Gladstone, in one of his *Good Words* papers ("good words" in more than one sense), has called attention to "the increased and increasing dominion" in our modern life "of the things seen over the things unseen," and our consequent danger, even while still acknowledging allegiance to the traditional ideal, of becoming the dupes and slaves of sheer materialism. "My twofold proposition," he says, "is that we see before us an increased power of things seen, and that this increased power implies a diminishing hold upon us of things unseen. Throughout the history of mankind, the invisible, and the future which is part of the invisible, have been in standing competition with what may be termed the things of the world. There has never been a time in human history to compare with the last half century in two vital respects: the multiplication of wealth and the multiplication of the enjoyments which wealth procures. . . . Obviously, almost mathematically, the increased powers of worldly attraction disturb the balance of our condition, unless and until they are compen-

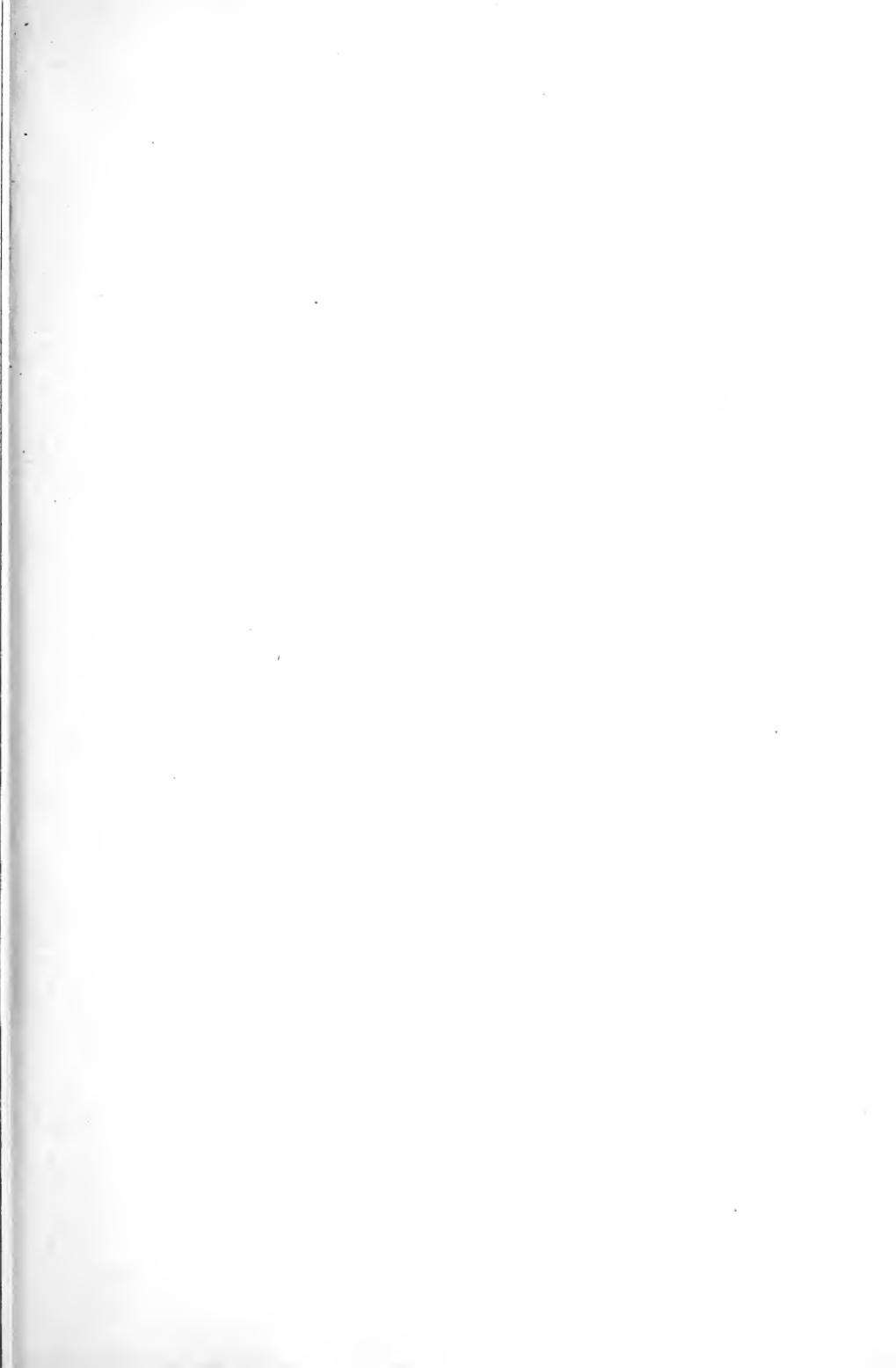
sated by increased powers of unworldly attraction and elevation. Where are such compensating powers to be had ? I am afraid we can hardly say that, in the spheres now under view, there has been such a growth in unworldly motives and ideas as to counterveil the augmented strength of worldly attachment. And I apprehend that if the unseen world and the ideas belonging to it operate upon us with a proportionately diminished force, it follows, almost as a matter of course, that creeds which belong to that circle of associations will be more dimly and therefore more feebly apprehended.” He goes on to say that he has no fear that “ materialism *as a formulated system*,” or philosophical theory of life, is or is likely to be on the increase. “ But the power of a silent, unavowed, unconscious materialism is a very different matter. . . . There are in human nature a multitude of undeveloped (so to speak), embryonic forces of impressions received from without and finding a congenial soil within, which never make their way to maturity, or obtain a definite place in our consciousness. My belief is that at this moment these untested, not thoughts, but rudiments of thought, are at work among us and within us ; and were they translated or expanded into words, their sense would be no more nor less than the old vulgar sense of those who

in all ages have held that, after all, this world is the only world we securely know, and that the only labor that is worth laboring, the only care that is worth caring, the only joy worth enjoying, are the labor, the care, the joy that begin and end with it."

This is our real danger, this the real cause of the scepticism that is perceptibly growing in the present age. It is a decadence, not of *belief* as dependent on sufficient evidence, but of *faith* as the realization of the spiritual and eternal. We need—oh, how greatly we need—a revival of this faith ! We need to *feel* that this is God's world, in which we have our being, and that He is not a dead God, but *the living God*; that He cares for and communes with His creatures, whom He hath endowed with spiritual intelligence, not only by revelations in the far distant past, and by causing the substance of such revelations to be printed in a book, but as truly and as directly now and here, in every-day life and every possible phase of present experience. We need a revival of religion in accordance with the old definition, the *life of God in the soul of man*. Without this, in vain is all our zeal for orthodox expressions, and to no purpose our scrupulous adherence to the ritual regulations of the Church or insistence upon implicit belief in the inspired infallibility of the Book. If there be in

our faith nothing more than this, it is a dead faith, and our God is a fetich. The true God is THE LIVING GOD, and the only true faith is that which has its realizing consciousness in living communion with Him, with Him in adoring assimilation to the pure perfection of His righteousness, and in grateful and loving admiration of the full graciousness of His infinite love. This, and nothing short of this, is truly to know God and to have fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ.



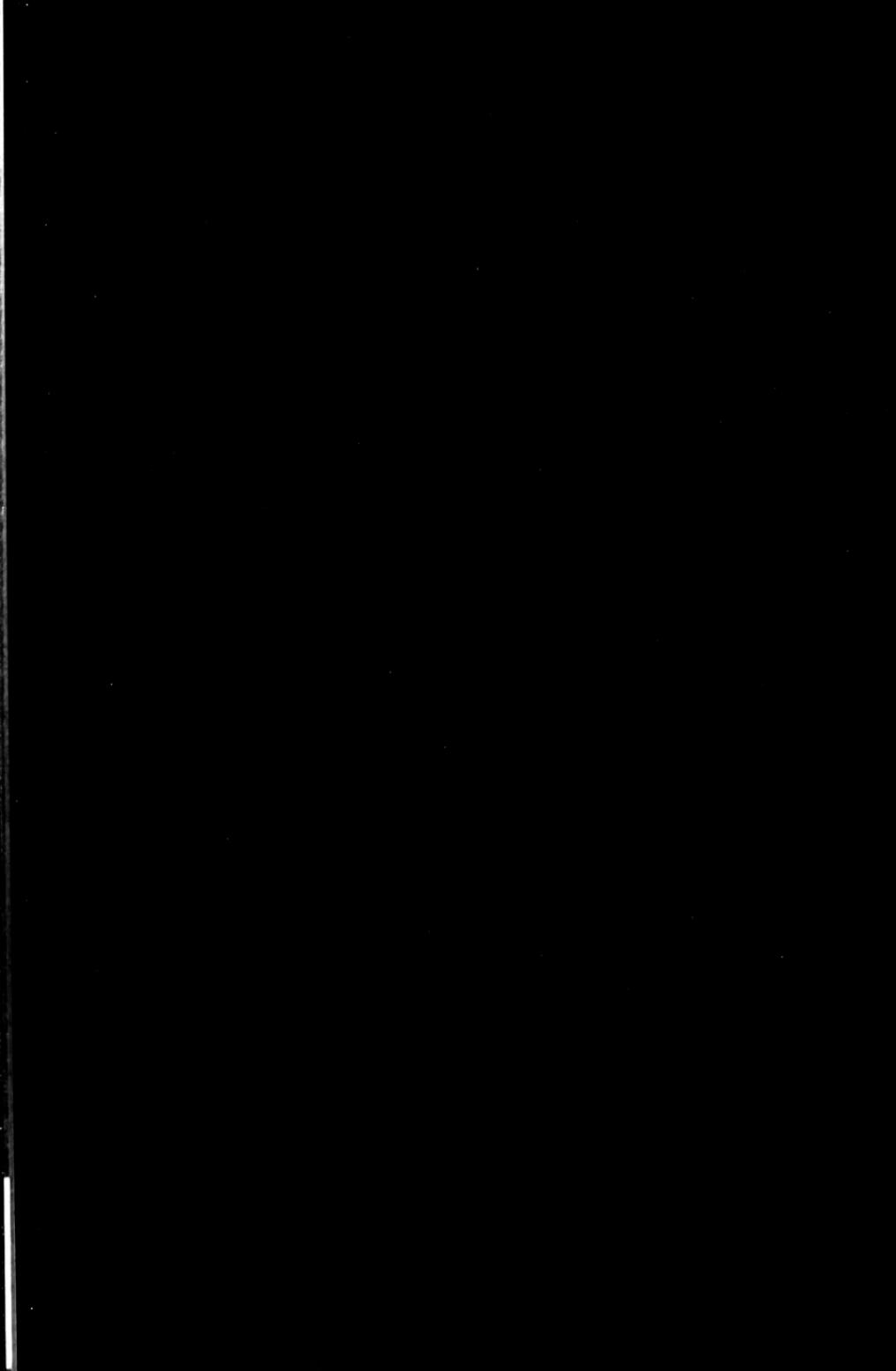


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